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MODERN PLAYS

THE MOVERS

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

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THE MOTHER

BY THE SAME
AUTHOR

THE SECRET WOMAN
THE SHADOW
DOWN DARTMOOR WAY
CURTAIN RAISERS
A BREEZY MORNING

ETC. ETC.

THE MOTHER

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

"Thy Mother is like a Vine in thy Blood"

NEW YORK
BRENTANO'S
1914

PR 5177
.M6
1914

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CHARACTERS

IVES POMEROY, *son of Avisa Pomeroy.* Aged 25.
MATTHEW NORTHMORE, *of Stone Park Farm.* Aged 45.
ARTHUR BROWN, *a schoolmaster.* Aged 30.
NATHAN CAWKER, *known to the world as "Moleskin."* Aged 60.
GEORGE BONUS, SAMUEL WICKETT } *labourers at Stone Park.*
EMMANUEL CODD, *potman at the "Green Man."* Aged 70.
NICHOLAS TOOP, *a policeman.* Aged 28.
INSPECTOR FORREST.
TWO CONSTABLES.
BUTCHER'S BOY.
AVISA POMEROY, *mistress of the "Green Man" public-house.* Aged 45.
LIZZIE POMEROY, *her daughter.* Aged 22.
RUTH RENDLE, *barmaid at the "Green Man."* Aged 24.
JILL WICKETT, *wife of Samuel Wickett.* Aged 25.

CAST OF THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF

THE MOTHER

AT THE REPERTORY THEATRE, LIVERPOOL,
OCTOBER 22, 1913

PRODUCED BY LAWRENCE HANRAY

IVES POMEROY	F. PENNINGTON-GUSH
MATTHEW NORTHMORE	LAWRENCE HANRAY
ARTHUR BROWN	ALGERNON GREIG
NATHAN CAWKER	WILFRED E. SHINE
GEORGE BONUS	GEORGE DEWHURST
SAMUEL WICKETT	J. A. DODD
EMMANUEL CODD	HOWARD COCHRAN
NICHOLAS TOOP	CECIL ROSE
INSPECTOR FORREST	LAWRENCE ANDERSON
A BUTCHER'S BOY	LEONARD CLARKE
AVISA POMEROY	GERTRUDE STERROLL
LIZZIE POMEROY	EILEEN THORNDIKE
RUTH RENDLE	DOROTHY THOMAS
JILL WICKETT	KATHLEEN FITZSIMONS

ACT 1

SCENE: *The dwelling-room of the* POMEROYS *at "The Green Man" Inn. A low-ceiled room of good size. At the back a door, with glass panes in it, which are covered with a red curtain, opens into the bar, and a roll-top desk stands beside it; to the left is the fire-place, with a large easy chair on each side of it. To the right a wooden stair ascends from the room, and beneath it is a door, which leads to a cellar. This door is papered over like the walls of the room. The furniture is upholstered in horsehair and has white antimacassars thrown over it. Upon the walls are a few coloured prints from illustrated Christmas numbers, a large coloured portrait of Queen Victoria and so forth. Upon the mantel-shelf are chimney ornaments. The second entrance to this room is to the left below the window. A table is spread for tea.*

[ARTHUR BROWN, LIZZIE POMEROY *and* RUTH RENDLE *discovered at the tea-table about their meal.*

BROWN. More watercress, Miss Rendle, please. People don't eat enough watercress. No, Lizzie, your

mother does not understand Ives. When you became my fiancée, I turned my attention to the subject and soon found it a very painful one.

[*Shakes his head and eats watercress.*

LIZZIE. You're such a student of character, Arthur. Of course, all schoolmasters are. Dear Ives can't get over losing Jill Wickett.

RUTH. He's a rare stickler for justice.

BROWN. The truth is that when the girl threw him over Ives lost all self-control, and went to the bad.

RUTH. It was a mean thing! Jill had promised to marry Lizzie's brother and then——

BROWN. Took Samuel Wickett, at Mr. Northmore's farm. For his prospects, if I hear rightly. No more, Lizzie, thank you. You make the tea far too strong. It was a very improper match, because Samuel Wickett has a leg in the grave already, if you'll excuse the expression; but he is his old uncle's heir and Jill will get two thousand pounds by this marriage some day.

RUTH. Ives is well out of it, if she's that sort.

LIZZIE. So mother says. She was thankful when Jill gave him up.

RUTH. But you couldn't expect Ives to be.

LIZZIE. Ives is so dark and secret nowadays, and always with that hateful Mr. Cawker—him what they call "Moleskin."

BROWN. Grammar, Lizzie! Yes, Cawker is a most irregular old man and no friend for youth.

[RUTH *rises and finishes her cup of tea standing.*

BROWN. How does Mrs. Pomeroy find herself?

LIZZIE. Pretty well, Arthur; up and down, but she never tells us about her bad days till they're passed.

BROWN. I have advised her to consult——

[*Enter* IVES. *He accosts the women violently.*

IVES. Why the devil ain't one of you lazy girls in the bar? Keeping mother there when she ought to be at her tea.

RUTH. She's had her tea. I've only been five minutes.

IVES. [*Meaningly.*] Northmore's riding down the hill. [*Exit* RUTH *into the bar.* How the deuce she can stand that fiddle-faced fool beats me.

BROWN. Mr. Northmore is no fool, Ives.

IVES. It's his farm, of course. Everything in a petticoat is always thinking of Number One.

BROWN. Pull yourself together! You're too old to behave like a child.

IVES. Don't you lecture me, or I'll break your neck! You bully the school-children and that silly girl.

BROWN. You won't make me angry.

[*Brushes the crumbs off his waistcoat.*

LIZZIE. How dare you talk like that, Ives? You ought to be ashamed; and Arthur so patient with you!

IVES. Go to hell, and take him too! He's making you as hateful as himself.

[*Enter* EMMANUEL CODD *with a bucket of peat.*

BROWN. This is most ungentlemanly, Ives.

CODD. [*Very excited.*] Hast heard the great news? Two men blown to ribbons at the granite quarry.

IVES. And nobody better pleased than you, you adder.

CODD. Drunk again!

IVES. [*To* CODD.] Clear out, afore I kick you out! [CODD *scowls at* IVES.] And don't look at me like that, you ugly old ape!

CODD. I don't want to look at you.

IVES. Begone, then.

CODD. Aye, I'll go—and go for good. More I'll not endure. I give notice. I——

IVES. No such luck. You'll hang on here [*Exit* CODD *with bucket*] till you're rotten.

BROWN. This is very discreditable, Ives.

Enter AVISA *from the bar.*

LIZZIE. Mother, Emmanuel's given notice again.

AVISA. Has he? Poor, old, cranky chap.

BROWN. My visit to Exeter is fixed for Tuesday, Mrs. Pomeroy.

IVES. Then mind you buy Lizzie's tokening ring. 'Tis about time she had it.

AVISA. Hush, my dear; Arthur's talking.

IVES. Talking—what's the use of talking? His own stupid bleat's the only thing he cares to hear.

[*Flings himself down in the chair by fire.*

AVISA. Come, come, sonny!

IVES. I wish you wouldn't be so deadly calm, mother.

LIZZIE. How can you, Ives? Just because you're crossed.

IVES. "Crossed"! "Crossed"! When a man's life is scat to shivers! "Crossed"! Get out of my sight, you little fool, or I'll fling a knife at you.

[AVISA *sits down besides* IVES *and takes his hand. He flings her hand aside. She takes his hand again. He leaves it a moment.*

IVES. My blood's boiling!

AVISA. But don't let it boil over. Give him a cup of tea, Lizzie.

IVES. Tea! Hell fire—that's what I want to drink. Cuss the whole pack of you—hard-hearted, frozen creatures! [*Starts up and goes out.*

AVISA. [*Goes to her chair by the fire.*] No sight of land for my Ives yet, bless his heart.

BROWN. The first thing is to break the natural instincts, which are always evil. We begin at the wrong end, Mrs. Pomeroy.

AVISA. The fault of the age, my dear. They began at the other end—with a birch—in my young days.

BROWN. No, no! Corporal punishment is quite exploded.

AVISA. So his father thought—worse luck for Ives. The world's growing a soft place sure enough. I hope it won't grow silly soft.

LIZZIE. Ives has been drinking.

AVISA. Dear, stupid fellow. When I was a maid, such things happed to me, Lizzie, that I'd have got drunk too, sometimes—if I'd dared. [*Laughing gently.*

LIZZIE. Mother!

AVISA. If he'd known me when I was a girl, Arthur here would have thought I wasn't a good companion for you.

BROWN. You surprise me, Mrs. Pomeroy.

AVISA. [*Her face twinkling.*] A very headstrong, selfish maiden was I; and 'tis lucky I don't forget it.

LIZZIE. It's that hateful Jill. If Ives could only put her out of his mind and think of some other girl.

BROWN. It might save him. We know that the love of a really good woman——

LIZZIE. Ruth Rendle likes him, you can see she does.

AVISA. Ruth is all I'd wish her; but if you want truth, my pretty, she's a long way too good for our Ives. He's not wife-old for all his years.

LIZZIE. He says that Ruth's a frosty old maid.

AVISA. Not her! We're only old maids when the wrong man comes along. Frost in the morning—fire at night. Ives loves the showy girls—like a bird chooses a cherry.

[*A knock at the door.* LIZZIE *answers it and admits* MR. CAWKER. *He carries a gun and an old game-bag slung over his shoulder.*

CAWKER. Be that master-piece, your mother, home, Miss Lizzie? [*Comes in.*

BROWN. Well, I must take my leave. I return

from Exeter on Wednesday, by the 7.32, which reaches Tavistock at 8.51.

[*Shakes hands with* MRS. POMEROY. LIZZIE *goes out with him.*

AVISA. I want to see you, Moleskin. I'm a lot put about by a thing I heard in the bar five minutes agone.

CAWKER. How's your heart?

AVISA. It have to beat a brave while yet, please God.

CAWKER. I've brought 'e a pair o' golden plover for your own eating. [*Takes birds from his bag.*] And I must see Ives. He was in my company a bit not long ago—reckless like and up for justice and down on all tyrants.

AVISA. What has he done?

CAWKER. [*Shrugging his shoulders.*] God forgive me; we all know I'm like the moon and only shine by night; but Ives—

Enter LIZZIE.

AVISA. Run after your brother, Lizzie. Moleskin wants to see him.

[LIZZIE *takes her sunbonnet from a nail behind the door and goes out.*

CAWKER. Just the manhood in him crying out for justice; and if you can get your justice and your pleasure together—why, so much the better. You know me. I'm the same as the hawks and weasels. Life for me is death for something else. A gun's my only tool. My nature droops if I see a spade or a

pick-axe. There's nought so badly paid as honest work, and I don't like it; it don't suit me, and I won't touch it.

AVISA. Always a choice with you between doing wrong and doing nothing.

CAWKER. Any fool can work; it takes a man to play. I'll work my fingers to the bone—to escape work. Life's not a lesson—'tis a game, Avisa Pomeroy.

AVISA. A game of skill then, not a game of chance.

CAWKER. Ah, my dear, that all depends on what cards God Almighty deals out to 'e. If I'd got Squire Masterman's lot, I'd be a fine old English gentleman and a master of hounds, and the pride of ten parishes and the saviour of the poor. Any man could play that hand. But I've only got Nathan Cawker's cards, and so I'm a baggering old poacher and the shame of the country side. But I play my lot for all they're worth.

AVISA. For more than they're worth I reckon—and that's cheating. What's my boy been up to?

CAWKER. Trying to open the eyes of a rich man.

AVISA. Ives must learn a bit himself afore he can teach.

CAWKER. But I wouldn't have sorrow his schoolmaster.

AVISA. Not if happiness will do it. None that loves justice like him will go far wrong in the end.

CAWKER. [*Shaking his head.*] Justice be a funny shaped article—especially the justice of a justice of the peace. And 'tis so terrible difficult to get other

people to see your point of view. There was my father —lost his leg in a man-trap he did. And never saw the justice of it to his dying day. But your boy—terrible high-minded I'm sure—and a church-goer too.

AVILA. Aye. He goes to please me—and look at the girls. [*She laughs.*

Enter IVES.

CAWKER. Ah, here's the brave boy!

IVES. [*To* AVISA.] Let Codd pluck them birds. Don't you do it. 'Twill weary you.

AVISA. Moleskin wants you, and be full of mysteries. [*Exit* AVISA.

CAWKER. Here's the devil to pay. They pheasants of that hard-hearted creature, Square Masterman.

IVES. I don't care how hard he's hit.

CAWKER. I know. More do I. But he's going to hit back. 'Tis found out that you was there, and he knows it, and he's told the police to go ahead.

IVES. What about you?

CAWKER. Well—they suspect me—they always do suspect me at these times; but somehow they can't prove nothing—as usual. I was ill just then and kept my bed, and my daughter can swear an alibi. But you'll have to cut and run, I reckon, till the trouble's over.

IVES. Was it the poulterer at Tavistock gave me away?

CAWKER. He's in the cart too. The warrant's out. They'll come any minute.

IVES. I'll stand to it.

CAWKER. Don't you be a fool. 'Tis no good talking

free trade to the justices—nor yet socialism neither. I know 'em. You run away, my son—then you'll live to fight another day,

[*The door into the bar opens and* MATTHEW NORTHMORE *enters.*

NORTHMORE. Excuse me, Ives Pomeroy; but Miss Rendle knew that Cawker was in here, and I want to speak to him.

[IVES *and* CAWKER *regard* NORTHMORE *without friendliness.*

NORTHMORE. [*To* CAWKER.] It's this. I won't have you at Stone Park. I've warned you thrice. Don't trespass on my ground, or on my side of the river again, or I'll take the law into my own hands.

CAWKER. Now hearken to that! A right down Tory is Matthew Northmore; and for why? For the silliest, tom-fool reason in the world. Because his father was one afore him!

IVES. Narrow as the grave, you be, and cold as charity.

NORTHMORE. [*To* IVES.] You're young—too young to take good advice. But there's one thing will pay you, and that's to mind your own business. Experience is a hard master, and so you'll find it.

CAWKER. And what d'you think I was going to do, farmer? I was coming up to Stone Park this very night to offer to trap your rabbits—all free, gratis and for friendship. Trotting home in the dawn a bit ago, I see the varmints in your grass by the thousand. "Poor man," I thought, "I must help him. There

he is in his bed, sleeping like an innocent babe and——"

NORTHMORE. Liar! There's not a rabbit in my ground and you know it.

CAWKER. Then no doubt they was monkeys—or perhaps kangaroos.

IVES. You go back to Ruth and mend your manners.

NORTHMORE. Who are you to call her "Ruth"?

IVES. Don't you teach me how to treat the girls—a damned old bachelor like you.

CAWKER. Women be a noble branch of larning, farmer, but you've begun too late: you'll always be a dunce at 'em. Now I've loved 'em from the time I was fifteen.

Enter AVISA.

This wonder of women will bear me out. I kissed her afore she was five and offered to marry her when she was ten.

IVES. Come here, Moleskin. What's best to do?

[*Exeunt* MOLESKIN *and* IVES.

NORTHMORE. I'm sorry for your boy. He's going to the dogs, Mrs. Pomeroy.

AVISA. Very good company the dogs can be, Matthew.

NORTHMORE. They're honest and that's more than he is.

AVISA. Don't you say that, for I won't hear it. His father's son—faults enough, but honest and just.

NORTHMORE. I'm not the man's keeper and I can't be his friend, for he won't let me. He's lazy most times ; but he's been working a bit too hard for once—among Masterman's game birds.

AVISA. Ives ! You can believe that ?

NORTHMORE. I heard it from Inspector Forrest himself.

AVISA. Poaching ! 'Tis false. He'd never sink to it.

NORTHMORE. His left-handed justice. He's savage still over Wickett's wife and wanted somebody to smart. He needs a sharp lesson. Fourteen days hard he's earned—maybe more. I'm terrible sorry for you.

AVISA. It can't be—it can't be, Matthew. He couldn't do that. [AVISA *is much moved.*

NORTHMORE. I hope you're right. He'll have every chance to clear himself.

Enter RUTH *from the bar.*

RUTH. Here's Mr. Westlake about the cider barrels, Mrs. Pomeroy.

AVISA. [*Pulling herself together.*] I'll speak to him.

RUTH. The bar's empty.

AVISA. Think twice afore you let yourself believe this, Matthew. [*Exit* AVISA *into bar.*

NORTHMORE. I've hurt her—and cruel sorry to do it.

RUTH. About her son ? He means so well.

NORTHMORE. He's a rogue—and she'll live to know it. Leave him. You'll read the story-book I brought you, Miss Rendle ? 'Tis a good tale.

RUTH. Thank you very much, Mr. Northmore, Yes, I'll be sure to read it.

NORTHMORE. And you'll come for a walk o' Sunday?

RUTH. 'Tis most kind I'm sure.

NORTHMORE. I do greatly look forward to it. A promise, remember. Good-bye, and thank you for reading the book.

[*He shakes hands and looks at her with love. He holds her hand and she drops her eyes, from his ardent face. He goes out and she shuts the door, which he leaves open. Then she goes off to the bar. After a few moments* IVES *returns alone. He is excited. He takes a bunch of keys off a nail, goes to the big roll-top desk and opens it. He takes out a cash-box and is putting some money into his pocket when his mother returns from the bar.*

AVISA. Who's wanting that, sonny?

IVES. I am, mother. There's a bit of trouble coming, and I'd meant to stand up to it and say what I'd done it for, but 'twill be better not. They're after me for some of that blasted Masterman's pheasants.

[*He puts money in his pocket.*

AVISA. Well, you can face a lie.

IVES. 'Tisn't a lie. I shot 'em—for justice. Masterman's a slave-driver. He grinds the face of the poor He turned off my friend, Amos Coaker, for no fault. [*Laughing.*] Moleskin took the money—the sly dog. But he's safe. They can't touch him.

AVISA. [*Angry.*] How have you the heart—? You laugh—you ought to groan, Ives Pomeroy! I'd never have thought it—or dreamed it!

IVES. More fool you. I'm up against all tyrants, and so be all my side; and I'll strike where I please, and how I please, and as hard as I please.

AVISA. Do two wrongs make a right? 'Tis wild trash you be talking.

IVES. The rich shan't rob the poor for ever!

AVISA. [*Sternly.*] Be silent and hear me. That a son of mine should be rash and venturesome is natural; but no son of mine has the right to be a fool. To shoot a man's game——

IVES. You've laughed at my pranks before.

AVISA. You've never stolen your neighbours' goods afore. You've never dirtied your father's name afore.

IVES. All right, then; I won't trouble you with my affairs, mother. I hate money, and I hate the rich, and I hate you for siding with them. 'Tis mean cowardice to support the selfish wretches. I'll run at your apron-strings no more, if you're that sort.

AVISA. [*Sorrowfully and slowly.*] Then let life teach you your first hard lesson, Ives Pomeroy. And I'll bear it and bend to it for my love.

IVES. Let life teach me the strong want to help the weak. And I'll bend to it too. But they don't and never did. Wait till the weak all think alike, and then they'll be weak no more.

Enter LIZZIE.

LIZZIE. Here's Mr. Forrest and three policemen coming through the meadow gate!

IVES. Ha-ha! They'll bolt their coney—they won't catch him. [*Goes to door under the stairs.*] I'll slip in the cellar, and you nip round and unlock the grating afore they come, Lizzie. Hold 'em five minutes, mother, and I'm safe. [*Opens door and descends cellar steps. Then jumps up again.*] Come to the Hunter's Cross with a bit of food after midnight, Lizzie. I'll wait there till I see you, and then away. Tell Forrest I'm not at home, mother.

[*Goes down cellar steps, shuts the door behind him and prepares to haste away.*

AVISA. Bide where you be, Lizzie!

LIZZIE. But mother——

AVISA. Bide where you be. The darkest day that has ever dawned for us, my pretty.

LIZZIE. Oh mother, save him!

AVISA. Please God, I will!

Enter INSPECTOR FORREST, NICHOLAS TOOP, *and two other* CONSTABLES.

AVISA. [*Gripping her hands together and speaking to herself, but aloud.*] Lord have mercy on my son! Lord have mercy on my son! [*She controls herself and turns to* FORREST.] Good evening, Mr. Inspector.

FORREST. Good evening, ma'am. I'm proper sorry for this. 'Tis your boy. Here's the warrant. Us all hope he'll clear himself. But it looks terrible

like as if he had a hand in that pheasant shooting at Squire Masterman's.

AVISA. He had. He's told me. I'd have believed nobody but himself. He's here.

[*Goes to cellar stairs and opens the door.*

TOOP. A cruel thing for you, ma'am.

AVISA. Love's a hard taskmaster, Nicholas Toop.

FORREST. [*At top of stairs.*] Ives Pomeroy, I've got to arrest you for shooting of pheasants on the night of the third of November at Tudor Manor. For the present you'd best to say nought. Come quiet, like a man. My trap's outside. [*Takes handcuffs from one of the policemen. There is a pause.*] Stand by the door, Nicholas. You men go down.

[TOOP *stands by the door. The other two* POLICEMEN *descend into the cellar. No one speaks. There are muffled voices below. Then* IVES *ascends and enters. Behind him come the* POLICEMEN.

FORREST. You're wise not to——

IVES. [*In a rage to his mother.*] God damn you evermore for this, you traitor to your own son! And never again, so long as I live, shall my head come under your roof. And never will I call you "mother" more! [*Holding out his hands.*] Put 'em on! I'd sooner rot in clink till Doom than bide along with her. [*They handcuff him.*

FORREST. Come on, my lad. The dusk is down and none will see you.

IVES. [*To his mother.*] And if I go to hell, 'tis you have driven me there, you heartless devil!

[*He goes off between the two* POLICEMEN. FORREST *and* NICHOLAS *follow.* AVISA *exhibits physical pain and puts her hand to her bosom.*

LIZZIE. [*Weeping.*] Mother, mother! He'll darken our doors no more.

AVISA. [*Putting her arms round* LIZZIE.] Darken our doors he can't, my pretty. Better than sunshine always.

LIZZIE. [*Sobbing.*] He'll be the death of you!

AVISA. [*Takes her handkerchief and wipes* LIZZIE'S *eyes.*] Nay, nay; I'll be the life of him!

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE: *The bar of "The Green Man" public-house. The counter of the bar runs parallel with front of stage. To the left is a window and a door, to the right an open fireplace with a high settle at right angles to it, facing the proscenium. The floor is sanded. The usual paraphernalia of beer engine, bottles, water bottles, glasses, mugs, matches and ash-trays distinguishes the counter. There is a flap on the left side, which is thrown up and admits of access from the bar to the counter and to a door which opens from behind the counter. This is the door which communicates with the private parlour of the Pomeroys. It is of glass, covered with a red curtain. On the high dresser which runs behind the bar are rows of bright bottles, red and green wine-glasses, etc. Three barrels stand on trestles beneath them, and above these is a smaller barrel containing spirits. Various advertisements of brewers and wine merchants, and the bill of a sale of stock are hung about the bar. A few old sporting prints decorate the wall above the chimney shelf. The masks of a fox or two also hang upon*

the walls. An oil lamp hangs over the bar, and there is another smaller lamp on the mantelshelf. The time is evening.

[RUTH RENDLE *and* MATTHEW NORTHMORE *discovered. She stands behind the bar. He bends over towards her.*

RUTH. Have you heard any more of Ives Pomeroy?

NORTHMORE. No. 'Twas a light sentence. The Justices knew a bit about his family, and Masterman didn't press it against him. Since he came out he's been stopping with that old blackguard Cawker, the man he's got to thank for his trouble.

RUTH. But Moleskin would do anything for Mrs. Pomeroy. He's awful sorry. He's at Ives day and night to come home again. His mother's hopeful that it 'll soon happen. Each night she makes all ready for him.

NORTHMORE. There's more going on than she knows. And whose got the heart to tell her? There was great talk whether she did right or wrong to give him up. For my part she did very right. A lesson he wanted, as I told her, and a lesson he got; though it seems he won't learn it.

RUTH. No son of that woman could be very bad, Matthew.

NORTHMORE. He's bad all through, and the sooner you know it, Ruth, the better for your piece of mind. He's after my dairymaid again.

RUTH. Jill! But she's married.

NORTHMORE. That don t stop him. When she took Sam Wickett I was sorry for it. For one thing, poor Sammy's a dying man; for another, she's a worthless baggage, and only wanted his uncle's money. A proper liar, too. She's a good dairymaid, and that's all you can say for her; but she must be a bit of a fool, for if she goes wrong she'll lose what she married for.

RUTH. She's a lovely woman.

NORTHMORE. Be there more than one lovely woman in the world?

[*He looks at her and tries to catch her hand.*

RUTH. [*Sighing.*] If only you knew how your eyes make my heart ache, Matthew. I'm a stupid girl and full of trouble. I shall never make any man happy.

NORTHMORE. Then let a man make you happy. By God! I'd roam the wide world and fight the wide world to find happiness for you, Ruth.

RUTH. We must win our own happiness.

NORTHMORE. Love came late to me, but now 'tis a raging fire. Love's bitter quick to see and feel, without eyes or fingers. I know more about you than you know yourself. Everything I know—everything. There's but one living creature between you and me, and his name is Ives Pomeroy. There! 'Tis out—more shame on me; but you've made me dead to shame. I'd face the scorn of the whole world now for your sake.

RUTH. He's nothing to me, and you know it.

NORTHMORE. No, he's nothing to you, because he's

a blind and wilful fool. But he might be something —he might be everything.

RUTH. How dare you say that?

NORTHMORE. Because I'm mad, now and then, along with you; and the mad tell truth. I like to hurt you; I like to see the blood come and go in your cheeks. But what's your pain to mine? To think he might have you, and he's running after that trash, Sam Wickett's wife!

RUTH. You're a coward to say these things.

Enter ARTHUR BROWN *and* LIZZIE POMEROY.

BROWN. Ah, neighbour Northmore, a fine evening.

LIZZIE. [*To* RUTH.] The moon's that lovely down in the woods, Ruth, I wish you could see it. Arthur has been telling me how far off it is and exactly what it weighs.

BROWN. A bottle of lemonade, Miss Rendle, please. And pour it into two glasses. [*Takes out his purse, and speaks to* NORTHMORE.] I haven't signed anything you know—too liberal-minded for that I hope. But if you consider the teetotal movement in all its bearings, you must approve. So I am consistent and practise what I preach.

NORTHMORE. 'Tis hard to be consistent.

BROWN. Not to me; I never feel in the least tempted to change my opinions, when once they are formed.

[RUTH *has opened a bottle of lemonade and poured it into two glasses.* BROWN *gives*

RUTH *threepence.* LIZZIE *drinks her lemonade.* BROWN *sips his.*

NORTHMORE. I must be gone.

LIZZIE. We've seen Ives. He's hovering round like a homing pigeon, so mother says.

NORTHMORE. Hovering like a hawk, more like. Good night. Forgive me. [*To* RUTH.] 'Twas only truth I told. [*Shakes her hand.*] Good night.

[*Nods to* LIZZIE *and* BROWN.

[*Exit* MATTHEW NORTHMORE.

LIZZIE. Oh, Ruth, at Lane End we saw him. I spoke, but he didn't answer; and Arthur told him that he wished to hold out the hand of friendship and let the dead past bury the past; but Ives just slipped by us and took no notice.

BROWN. He really ought to bend to the rod. It's very unsatisfactory. He doesn't consider how such rash behaviour affects the community. Many men in my position, Miss Ruth, would think twice before contracting an alliance with such a man!

LIZZIE. Arthur!

RUTH. I'm afraid he'd break every bone in your body, Mr Brown, if you threw Lizzie over.

BROWN. I throw her over! Am I the sort of man who could throw the woman of my choice over, Miss Ruth? Oh, no—quite the contrary I assure you. I'm merely saying what some men might do.

Enter JILL WICKETT.

JILL. Good evening. Be my husband here?

RUTH. No, Jill.

JILL. 'Tis time he was home. He's been to Tavistock along with George Bonus to sell sheep, and he's sure to come in here on his way back to Stone Park.

LIZZIE. I hope he's better, Jill?

JILL. He'll never be no better, poor chap.

BROWN. It should be your privilege to brighten his declining days, Mrs. Wickett.

JILL. I've done what I could, schoolmaster. He wants a nurse not a wife.

BROWN. There is no nurse like a good wife, my poor woman.

Enter AVISA *from behind the bar.*

AVISA. Get to bed, you girls. 'Tis time you was off. I'll take the bar till Codd comes home.

LIZZIE. Oh, mother, we saw Ives at Lane End.

BROWN. I saluted him with friendship; but he—— [*Shakes his head and looks at his watch.*] Good gracious! Ten o'clock. What am I thinking about!

AVISA. Good night, Arthur. Be off, Lizzie; and you too, Ruth.

BROWN. [*To* LIZZIE.] Good night, dear one. [*Raises his hat.*] Good night, ladies. [*Exit* BROWN.

RUTH. Let me stop till Codd comes back.

AVISA. No, I'm very well to-night—very happy too. [*To* RUTH.] He's near—I know it—I feel it somehow.

LIZZIE. [*Goes behind the bar and kisses her mother.*] Good night, mother. He won't hold off much longer. He can't.

[*Goes off behind bar.* JILL *moves to window of room and lifts blinds and looks out.*

RUTH. Let me stop?

JILL. Best to go, Miss. I want a word with Mrs. Pomeroy.

AVISA. You go, Ruth.

RUTH. Good-night, then. Don't be standing—'tis bad for you. Sit in your chair. [*Exit* RUTH.

AVISA. What's the matter with you, Jill?

JILL. Be you bearing malice against me still?

AVISA. Not I. And never did. No need to go back to that. You flung over my boy and I was glad of it.

JILL. I did wrong, and I was punished, and my lot's a cruel hard one, I can tell you. But I'm here for your son's sake—not for my own.

AVISA. What has he got to do with you now?

JILL. I'm only his messenger. I've seen him a bit of late. I've comforted him, and he's comforted me for that matter. He was in sore need of a friend, and so was I.

AVISA. Good powers, Jill Wickett, what are you talking about?

JILL. [*Shrugging her shoulders.*] He'll tell you. He's a rare wonder, and God knows why ever I gave him up. Nobody understands the man like you and me. A proper hero he is.

AVISA. This won't do; and if you're playing about with him again——

JILL. 'Tis no use talking to me like that, Mrs. Pomeroy; I'm only a girl, and a cruel unhappy girl, too. I've paid with a bucket of bitter tears for my mistake. He knows. Your son knows. But 'tis hard when you're so young as me to— But life's opened my eyes and showed me myself, and showed what your son be, too, for that matter. I'm a woman as feels, and I do to others as they do unto me, Mrs. Pomeroy. I'm built so. If I'm happy I want for the rest of the world to be happy; but if I'm miserable I try my very best to make everybody else the same. And I be miserable now, and what girl wouldn't be— linked to a death's head? You can't ask a fine creature like me to ruin my life——

AVISA. Have done, Jill! What wicked stuff is this you're talking?

JILL. He'll tell you. 'Tisn't wicked—'tis nature. 'Twas a message from Ives that I brought. He's not fifty yards away at this moment; and to-night, when the pub's shut up, he's coming home—coming to see you for a bit.

AVISA. To-night?

JILL. After closing. And I'll say this before he comes. He's a brave, good fellow, and I'm proud to call him my friend, and I'd lay down my life for him, and I don't care who knows it.

Enter CODD.

AVISA. [*Aside to* JILL.] I'll open the bar door to him when they've gone.

JILL. He's very wishful to have you his side, ma'am, and so be I. He loves you something tremendous. He's forgiven everything and hopes you'll do the same.

AVISA. [*Putting her hand to her breast.*] I felt it—I felt he was coming home to-night.

JILL. [*To* AVISA.] He's terrible wishful to pleasure you; and so be I—God knows. Good-night, ma'am. I'll tell him you'll be here. [*To* CODD.] If my Sammy comes in, you bid him hurry home, Mr. Codd. 'Tis time the poor chap was to bed. [*Exit* JILL.

CODD. What be she doing here? Like her cheek to come and see you—the cat.

AVISA. A message from my son.

CODD. Ah! She carries his messages, do she? Mark me, she'll be carrying something else of his afore long!

AVISA. [*Concerned with her own thoughts.*] My son be coming back again.

CODD. Of course—who doubts it? 'Tis all talk and cussing and noise with him. Here's the only place in the world where he can have his victuals free, and waste his time, and do no work, and run about and play and let his mother pay for his fun.

AVISA. Why be you such a bitter-weed, Emmanuel? [*Going.*

CODD. Because I ban't built to forget, nor yet to forgive. 'Tis only born fools do either.

[*Exit* AVISA *through door at back of bar.*
CODD *pours himself out a drink.*

Enter GEORGE BONUS *and* SAMUEL WICKETT.

CODD. And he'll brew hell-broth for everybody again afore long—Ives Pomeroy—poisonous toad that he is.

BONUS. Give us a drop of gin, Codd. Here's poor Sammy Wickett coughing his soul up.

WICKETT. As to Ives Pomeroy, my wife says that he's going to be quite a reformed character; don't she, George?

BONUS. We'll hope so.

CODD. Your Jill says it? [*Helping them to drink.*

WICKETT. Yes, my dear wife have had a bit of talk along with him. He's forgiven her in a very Christian spirit, so she tells me. She couldn't help loving me better'n him; could she, George?

BONUS. Of course not. Love don't ax leave to come.

CODD. Nor yet to go again. Did you sell the sheep?

WICKETT. We sold 'em. 'Twas a great adventure. They fetched three pound more than Mister Northmore counted on—didn't they, George?

BONUS. So they did, Sammy.

WICKETT. [*Laughing feebly.*] And I've got the money in my pocket; ain't I, George?

BONUS. I hope so. Drink up and we'll have one more for luck.

WICKETT. 'Tis wonnerful the prices master gets for his things.

CODD. Lucky in life—unlucky in love, that man.

BONUS. He's terrible gone after your Miss Rendle, without a doubt.

WICKETT. 'Twould be a very good thing if she was to take him; wouldn't it, George?

CODD. He've escaped 'em till now. What does he want to mess himself up with a female for?

WICKETT. 'Twould be a godsend for Stone Park if he was to get such a fine, clever woman.

[CODD *begins to wash dirty mugs and tumblers.*

CODD. Your wife was in here a minute ago. She wants you home. 'Tis time you was to bed.

WICKETT. She's that thoughtful for me! My cough keeps her awake six nights out of seven, but she never grumbles. A patient woman and good as gold. It shows she married me for myself, and not for my uncle's money; don't it, George?

[CODD *fills their glasses.*

BONUS. Certainly it do—a very good woman—as women go.

WICKETT. You see I've lost all hope of the money now. [*Laughing.*] Marriage be like mumps seemingly. 'Tis catching. My old uncle's to be wedded, so 'tis good-bye to his cash. Quite a young woman he's took. A most amazing world, as I've often said; haven't I, George?

BONUS. Do your wife know about it?

WICKETT. I told her o' Thursday—broke it to her; and then told my old mother; and then I came in here and told Mrs. Pomeroy. And now I don't care

who knows it. And my Jill took it that quiet and brave without a pinch o' fuss— like the rare girl she be. "I married you—not your money," she said to me, without turning a hair. I'm sure I don't know what I did to win such a wife. But when I'm well and strong again, I'll make it up to the woman.

Enter CAWKER.

CAWKER. Cheero, boys! Did I hear the noble name of "woman" in your mouth, Sammy?

WICKETT. My wife 'twas, Moleskin. Of course, I wouldn't praise any other man's wife. Because that wouldn't be proper.

[WICKETT *coughs, goes to the fire with his glass and sits on the settle.*

CODD. Cuss all women—crooked, shifty wretches!

CAWKER. 'Tis a wonder they haven't wrung your neck for you afore now, Codd.

CODD. Women be a devilish invention. You can break in their bodies—not their hearts. You've got to watch 'em as if you was a tiger-tamer. Take your eye off for a second and they'll pounce and tear your soul out.

WICKETT. That's going too far, Emmanuel. I'm sure no woman born would tear a man's soul out.

[CODD *helps* CAWKER *to spirits from a special bottle which he takes from shelf and leaves on counter.*

CAWKER. Ah! You're one of the lucky ones, Sammy.

WICKETT. Sometimes I wonder how ever I got the pluck to offer for her. Till I was up home twenty year old, my eyes always watered when I passed a maiden.

CAWKER. Fancy that! 'Twas my mouth always watered when I passed 'em.

WICKETT. I'd blush afore 'em something fearful.

[*Coughs.*

BONUS. Don't you talk; you listen.

CAWKER. 'Tis the surprises in 'em that always drew me. Uncertain as sporting. A wonderful gamble they be—never so near as when they furthest off, and never so far off as when they be in your arms with their lips on your cheek.

CODD. Claws of Satan—every one of 'em!

CAWKER. Have a drop along with me, you chaps. You can carry another, Sammy. You want uplifting. That cough shakes you like a leaf. Give him three fingers, Codd.

WICKETT. Be I up for another, George?

BONUS. Yes—for once in a way.

CAWKER. You must take more pride in yourself, Sammy. You're a very good man—so long as you've got a better to watch you. And when all's said you'll make so fine a meal for worms as the best among us.

[*Slaps him on the back.*

WICKETT. I may or I may not, though 'tis very kind of you to praise me, Moleskin.

[CODD *pours out more drink.*

Enter NICHOLAS TOOP *in uniform.*

CAWKER. Ah! Here's policeman Toop, to tell us 'tis closing time. We be all safe, thank the Lord, while he walks and watches.

CODD. [*To* CAWKER.] You deep scoundrel! A disgrace to the police you be, and well may you laugh at 'em. If they was worth their salt they'd have catched you red-handed twenty year ago.

CAWKER. [*Laughs.*] Do 'e hear this old fool, Nicholas?

CODD. A disgrace, I say—like a plague they can't cure be a disgrace to the doctors.

CAWKER. Ha-ha! Catch me first and cure me afterwards, as the haddock said. [*Winks at the policeman.*

TOOP. We'll take you yet, Moleskin, and I hope I may be the man to do it.

CAWKER. I hope you may, I'm sure I hope you may, Nicholas. 'Twill be a great feather in your cap, but 'tis very unlikely. For why? I'm as honest as a bird on a bough. And so be you, ban't you, Sammy? Just the sort of chaps—you and me—to go fox-hunting with a flock o' sheep!

WICKETT. No, no, I won't neighbour along with you, Moleskin. I'm a very respectable young man, and always first to my bed of a night since I married, ban't I, George?

CAWKER. [*Tolerantly.*] There — there — you run home to your red wife, and tell her to put a mustard plaster on your poor chest.

BONUS. 'Tis time we was away. Get going, Sammy, I'll be after you in a minute.

WICKETT. So I will, then, else my Jill will be worritting. Good-night, gen'lemen all.

TOOP. [*Looking after* WICKETT.] Poor soul. They'll soon put him to bed with a spade.

CAWKER. And what will Jill Wickett do then, fine thing?

TOOP. Marry a man, I should think.

CODD. By name of Nicholas Toop, perhaps?

TOOP. Might do better—might do worse.

CODD. After her a'ready, I daresay—and not the only one. She draws the men like treacle draws the flies.

CAWKER. [*To* CODD.] Dirty inside and dirty outside you be. Always quick to think evil. If you wasn't so old, I'd duck you in the goose pond, Emmanuel, and make you drink a pint o' tadpoles afore I let you out.

[*Enter* MRS. POMEROY *from behind bar. She has shawl over her shoulders.*

CAWKER. Ah! Good evening, missis. You did ought to give this bald, old carrion-crow a pinch of your charity.

TOOP. I do hope you'm pretty clever, ma'am.

[AVISA *gives* TOOP *a small glass of sloe gin.*

AVISA. [*Smiles.*] My heart be growing too old for my body, so they say, Nicholas.

CAWKER. Be growing to big for it, more like. Never was such a heart o' gold afore.

CODD. 'Tis her rambling, wicked son be pushing her downhill.

AVISA. [*Giving* CODD *a drink over the bar.*] Take your nightcap and be off to bed, Emmanuel. I'll lock up to-night.

CAWKER. I'm working steady at Ives. He's mending fast. I led him astray, God forgive me, so the least I can do is to bring him back to the fold again.

CODD. Aye, like the wolf comes back. [*Gets his hat and prepares to go.*] Us'll live to see you strung up yet, I hope, Nathan Cawker! [*Exit* CODD.

CAWKER. [*To* AVISA.] What a dear old man he is! Your Ives is getting wiser and broader-minded every minute. Mark me, Avisa, he'll be home afore you expect him. I be at him to come home every hour. I give him no rest.

TOOP. There's nought like a bit of a shake up, same as he had, to steady a young youth. And no sensible man will think the worse of him once he shows himself good for something. Well [*drinking his sloe gin*], closing time, souls. Good-night all. [*Exit* TOOP.

CAWKER. I'm going trout-fishing to-morrow, thank the Lord! [*Lights pipe and puts matches in his pocket, also sugar and a lemon.*] Good night, and get well quick, Avisa Pomeroy. Women like you be growing terrible scarce in the land. Come on, George.

[*Exeunt* CAWKER *and* BONUS.

[AVISA *puts out the swinging lamp over the bar. She is tremulous. She goes to door and listens. Then she mends the fire and kneels*

by it, her senses alert. IVES POMEROY *comes in. She hears him and rises.*

IVES. Have you forgiven me, mother?

AVISA. [*The acute emotion visible when she was alone is hidden now. She is calm and collected before him She smiles.*] My own dear son! [*Kisses him and holds his hand.*] My boy! Supper's in the oven for you.

IVES. You wonder! Nought can change you. Be the girls to bed? I've got a lot to say.

AVISA. They're both to bed. [*Goes to lock the door.*

IVES. Nay; I ban't come to stop to-night. There's a fine adventure afoot.

AVISA. [*Locks the door and smiles at him.*] I've caught my chick now. I knew he'd hop back to his nest again, if 'twas only for the old bird's sake.

IVES. Soon—soon I'll come; but not to-night. A terrible big thing have got to be done to-night. How be you going on? Be you strong enough to hear about it? Did Jill call in a bit ago?

AVISA. [*Sitting by the fire.*] She came.

IVES. [*Looking round.*] I feel as if I'd been away ten year! [*Goes behind bar and gets a drink of ale.*] Have a drop o' brandy afore I speak to 'e, mother?

AVISA. [*Shakes her head.*] Jill Wickett had something on her mind seemingly.

IVES. And well she might. And me too. And you—a wise woman like you—you'll soon see how 'tis between us. I've larned such a lot of wisdom. I be growed from a boy to a man now, mother.

'Twas knowledge hard got; but it won't be wasted. I look back and laugh to think how wrong I was.

AVISA. You'll see life clearer now, Ives.

IVES. So I do then—so clear as the stars. I'm going to right a wrong, mother.

AVISA. 'Tis a great thing to right wrongs.

IVES. [*Coming over to her.*] When Jill took Wickett, I said 'twas like a red squirrel mating with a white mouse. She was wicked to do it, and it couldn't come to no good. And more it did. She did evil and so did I; and we both were punished for it. But I'm a strong man, thank God, though she's a weak woman. She ain't going to suffer no more. 'Tis done, mother. She'll be free afore sunrise!

AVISA. Free!

IVES. And you've got to swear, by the living God, to be our side. But I know you will be. Didn't you forgive Tom Bassett's wife for running away with the carpenter? And didn't you say she was right to leave that drunken, worthless dog, her husband? Jill's suffered—oh, she's suffered, I can tell you! That Samuel! Heaven's the only place for him. She hates him—hates his cough and his weakness and his silliness. Any decent woman would, for he's half a fool. But be one mistake to wreck a whole life? Not if I can help it. 'Tis all in a nutshell, mother. Jill shan't waste herself on that poor atomy of a man no more. She was meant for me, and only me. I've took my own money out of the bank—five-and-fifty pounds. She's being

tortured to death, and I won't endure it another hour; and this very night we be going to cut and run together.

AVISA. [*Shuts her eyes and leans back. Then she sits up, braces herself, and takes a long breath.*] Well, the woman can't do no more than that for 'e.

IVES. Ah! We were wise to trust you!

[*Pause. Then* AVISA *rises and puts her arm on* IVES' *shoulder.*

AVISA. Sit down here beside me and we'll talk about it.

IVES. 'Tis this way: Wickett will divorce her, or else die—no odds which, for his thread be spun, poor wretch; and then I marry her and come home again to you. And a mighty fine daughter-in-law she'll make.

AVISA. You've thought it all out, I see.

IVES. And mind this: she's loved me all along, mother. 'Twas only her people made her take that poor shadow for his uncle's money. She don't want it.

AVISA. She don't want it, because she can't get it, Ives.

IVES. What?

AVISA. Leave that and say all you've got to say.

IVES. You ain't going back on me, mother?

AVISA. Never, while my hands and wits can work for you. You've had sore troubled moments before you came to this. And now I must have some too. I'm a proud woman, Ives, to think you could come back to me—while there was time.

IVES. My mind's fixed. You'll never change it, mother.

AVISA. But you can change it yourself.

IVES. Don't you preach to me to-night—I ban't here for that.

AVISA. I'll not preach. 'Tis a short and sharp business you've planned, my dear—a simple thing, but the simplest things often have a kink in them.

IVES. [*Sitting by her.*] A man have got to show himself a man. Must Jill be denied all happiness for evermore because she's made a mistake? She's young and wants her share of joy. And why not? I be thinking for her, not myself.

AVISA. [*Putting her arm on his shoulder.*] Think for her—that's right. Think deeper yet for her.

IVES. She trusts me like my dog trusts me. And 'tis all over now, anyway. She'll meet me at the Hunter's Cross a bit after midnight. My solemn oath she's got, and I wouldn't go back on it for any living soul.

AVISA. She swore on oath too—in the holy house of her Maker. She's Wickett's wife—before men and God Almighty.

IVES. Forced into it by her folk.

AVISA. Not she! She went her own way and always have and always will. For you to strike such a man as Wickett! For my strong Ives to rob that poor creature! 'Tis like taking away a dying child's toy.

IVES. The woman shan't be tortured no more, I tell

you—not another day! I've gone too far to turn back now, and wouldn't if angels came between.

AVISA. [*Rising.*] Turn back you must, for this is the turning-point.

IVES. Never, mother. My word's given.

AVISA. For her sake, Ives.

IVES. For her sake I'd die sooner! If you but knew what she is.

AVISA. I know her better than you do, my son.

IVES. 'Tis hell to hear one woman fight against another; and I won't hear it. She's first with me now, and will be for evermore. [*Starting up.*] Have you forgot what 'twas to love, mother?

AVISA. [*Gently.*] Not I—else I'd not be here now, Ives. You shall put another first. 'Tis right to lift the sweetheart highest—'tis nature. True lovers be like streams that run together to part no more. They give all, and ask all back. But a mother—'tis her pure joy to give all and ask for nothing. A mother be the bird's wing over her little ones—spread to keep 'em warm and safe till they need it no more.

IVES. Jill only lives for me now.

AVISA. [*Strongly.*] Live for her, then—for her right and her honour and her good name. Be just to her—you that love justice. Look back at what you've learned since last you was under your mother's roof, and list to what your own inner voice be telling you.

IVES. She's mine by all right and reason and always was.

AVISA. Her husband's dying.

IVES. What's his life to me? 'Tis her life I'm fighting for.

AVISA. For my sake, put this away from you, Ives.

IVES. You'll live to be glad I deny you, mother.

AVISA. I've tried and failed then. I'd have lifted you to see the ugly truth if I could. I can't. I don't blame you for that; I only blame myself.

IVES. You'll live to be glad I won, I tell you.

AVISA. 'Tis you would live to be sorry. You've not won, dear heart. You can't win that way. But I'll help you to win yet. I'd have beat you with right if I could [*takes his hand*], but now 'tis with might that I must beat you.

IVES. The might is mine.

AVISA. The might is truth. Come close to me. I'm going to hurt my boy now.

VES . [*Sitting beside her.*] You'll never hurt me no more, mother. I'll never quarrel with you no more.

AVISA. When did Jill say she'd run away with you?

IVES. Last Thursday night.

AVISA. But you'd asked her before?

IVES. A score o' times, and I ban't ashamed of it.

AVISA. 'Twas on the morning of Thursday that Samuel Wickett heard his old uncle was going to wed again.

IVES. Wed again! 'Tis a lie!

AVISA. Ask Samuel. And that decided her—not your prayers. Jill's deeper far than you, and looks

further ahead. It hurts me to strike the woman behind her back, but——

IVES. She couldn't do nothing like that. [*Pause.*] Oh God, mother, how can you think so bad of her? 'Tis cruel of you!

AVISA. Cruel? Not I. I mean nought but kindness. Hark to me, that never spoke a word to you without love. She's treated you evil; and I say "return good for evil." Save her from herself, Ives.

IVES. I won't believe she knew.

AVISA. You must. She's a very witty girl—cautious—and far-sighted.

IVES. There be none to fight her battles but me.

AVISA. She can fight her own battles far cleverer than you can. Did she trust you? Tell me that. Did you get so much as a kiss till Sam told her the money was gone? One kiss, Ives? Speak the truth to me. [IVES *is much agitated.*] Wasn't it her that offered to run away? I think it was.

IVES. [*Angry.*] I'll go and strangle her——

AVISA. Don't you do that. Any fool could do that. The big way—your way—is to leave it once for all; and she'll know bitter well why you have. 'Tis right she should smart a bit for this. 'Twas a mean thought and far ways off justice and plain dealing to slight you so and flout her poor man's honour. Let the night air cool her; let the Hunter's Cross talk to her—and the moon and the stars. Let the light o' dawn creep to her presently—not you. 'Twill show her the same sad, ugly things that I've

been showing you. You be wise, and go to your bed and forgive her. Aye, let your strength forgive her weakness, my son. Let her find that you wasn't the sort to be played with. Let her know what she's lost.

IVES. [*Angry and walking about.*] Blast her—cunning devil! I see it now—a lot more than you can see. I'll never forgive her. She may freeze and rot for all I care.

AVISA. Your room's waiting for you up over.

[*Points overhead.*

IVES. Not to help her from hell would I stir now. God judge me if I'll breathe the same air with her again. To think she could trick a man like me! And I'd have given my life up for her!

[*He goes out behind bar. His mother collapses for a few moments. Then she takes the brandy bottle, pours brandy into a glass, mixes it with water and drinks it. She listens awhile, looks upward and hears* IVES *trampling overhead in his room. She carries the light from the mantelshelf to the edge of the counter nearest the door. Then she unlocks and opens the door. She puts her shawl over her head, extinguishes the lamp and goes out into the night, shutting the door behind her. Overhead there is still heard the trampling of* IVES.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE: *The bar of "The Green Man" as before. The stage is dark; the time is dawn. Two months have passed since the events of the previous act.*

[EMMANUEL CODD *opens door at the back of the bar and enters. He lifts flap of counter and shuffles about. He goes to window beside the door on the left of the bar, opens shutters, and admits a stream of red morning light. The bar is untidy as it was left overnight. A peat smoulders on the low fire.* CODD *mends the fire and begins to sweep the floor. While he is doing so there is a knock at the door. He shows surprise, unbolts the door and flings it open. A great stream of ruddy light breaks through, and in the light appears* JILL WICKETT.

CODD. What the mischief do you want?

JILL. Some brandy. There ain't a drop at Stone Park. Sam very near croaked last night. I thought he was gone. But he ain't got the sense even to die, poor creature. Northmore's given us a ticket for the hospital to Tavistock. He goes in to-morrow if they can move him.

CODD. Be the new shepherd come?

JILL. Farmer ain't got one yet.

CODD. Wonder if Northmore would look at me?

JILL. You! A pretty old shepherd you'd make! Shepherd to the beer barrels be your business.

CODD. I'm leaving The Green Man.

JILL. Not you! You'll never go.

CODD. 'Tis that damned dog up over. [*Pointing to ceiling.*] Speak soft, else he'll hear you. Sacked me—sacked me after fifty year of work, with his father and grandfather afore him.

JILL. 'Twill come to nought. You'll stop.

CODD. 'Tis done I tell you. In my rage I gave gave notice again—just a habit I've falled into when that thorn pricks me—and he's took it. And when I went to his mother, she upheld him.

JILL. She's always on his side. She's always fighting the devil for him.

CODD. But I ain't done with him yet. I'll get my knife into the wretch afore I'm gone.

JILL. [*Interested.*] You're not the only one, I reckon. He wants——

CODD. He wants hell; and I be going to give it to him, the Lord helping. Justice be his cry—then let him taste it. I'd lie behind a hedge and put daylight into him if I wasn't so old and near my end.

JILL. What's he done to you?

CODD. Five shilling a week pension—that's what he's done to me. Five shilling a week, after fifty year o' work!

JILL. Give me a drink—I'm thirsty.

CODD. [*Drawing beer.*] An eye for an eye be the law, and a tooth for a tooth. That's justice.

JILL. [*Drinks.*] Here's justice for him then, and ten years in gaol.

CODD. Ah! Can you say that?

JILL. I'm joking. He's nought to me.

CODD. You be the fighting sort that might help an old man.

JILL. I don't want to quarrel with people. I'm a very easy, good-tempered woman, and my poor husband will tell you so, and Ives Pomeroy ought to know, if anybody did. When I be happy, I like for everybody else to be happy; but when I'm troubled, I get wicked and don't care what mischief I make.

CODD. I be the same. That's justice, that is.

JILL. You let Pomeroy alone—he's too strong for you.

CODD. Is he? How if his hay-ricks catched fire some fine night? He's at odds with Matthew Northmore and a score o' men. 'Twould never be guessed who done it.

JILL. [*Laughing.*] You're dull. If I hated a chap, I reckon my wits would work sharper than that.

CODD. What could hit him harder than his hay?

JILL. Why, you want to get him locked up, don't you, not yourself? 'Tis for him to set fire to another man's ricks.

CODD. Ah! If you want to do a bit of proper, clever wickedness, ax a female to help.

JILL. That's true, so I'd best be gone afore you wake the devil in me.

CODD. 'Tis all hiss and no sting with you. What's the use of being a snake if you can't bite?

JILL. I'm no snake—only a terrible unlucky woman.

CODD. You want the fool for yourself—when your husband dies. [*Laughs sourly.*] That's the game; but don't you think it. You won't get him. He laughs at you behind your back and calls you foul names—to please somebody else.

JILL. Does he? If it weren't for his mother——

CODD. What's she to you? Didn't she do her best to keep him from marrying you in the first place? You be frightened to do anything when it comes to a bit o' danger.

JILL. Frightened—me? What have I got to lose—here or anywhere? 'Tis only fear of loss makes you frightened.

CODD. Why don't you have a dash at the rogue and serve him same as he's served other people?

JILL. I wouldn't sink to it. [*Pause.*] But, of course, any fool could see how to do it. Him and Northmore, at Stone Park, are always at each other's throats, like a brace o' dogs, the Lord knows why.

CODD. 'Tis over this here bar-maiden — Ruth Rendle.

JILL. What?

CODD. Didn't you know? Pomeroy's after her now on the quiet. I've marked it.

JILL. You mean that?

CODD. Yes, I do; and seeks to please her by scorning you. That's enough to quicken your wits I should think.

JILL. I wouldn't dirt my hands with the cur. But if I was you—then I should be very like to——

[*Going.*

CODD. What?

JILL. Be very like to remember that he often rides past Stone Park to Amicombe Hill, where the peat works are. And he often comes back of an evening, when the farm be very quiet and the day's work done.

CODD. That's right.

JILL. And, if he was my enemy, I should reckon a chap like him would be quite equal to putting a match to Northmore's big cattle-byre, and then off and away.

CODD. By God!

JILL. And I should have a look round, if I worked here, for his bills and papers.

CODD. No need—he leaves 'em all over the shop.

JILL. A careless chap.

CODD. And then, after the blaze, you find some of his letters, or what not, in the ruins?

JILL. Me! What be talking about? This ain't got nothing to do with me. Don't you drag me in, or I'll tell the policeman. All I say is, that if such a thing did happen, 'tis Matthew Northmore himself ought to find the proofs—not a poor, busy woman with her hands full of work and a dying husband.

CODD. The devil did ought to be proud of you!

JILL. Don't you say that. I'm all right. Nobody have ever catched me in a crooked act, and nobody ever shall. I do to others as I'd be done by. I'm only saying what a bad chap, like Ives Pomeroy, might do.

CODD. 'Twould be a good turn for Northmore too. Once that dog's put away and all's clear for farmer. Pomeroy rides off some fine morning, and then Northmore comes down here after this wench, and you send George Bonus on an errand.

JILL. Not I. I don't have nothing to do with it. I only hope as Pomeroy won't think on such a fearful deed.

CODD. He'll have done it afore Michaelmas.

JILL. Think no more of it, Emmanuel. You're not clever enough, nor yet wicked enough, to manage a job like that. I was only making fun.

CODD. 'Tis fun that'll get the broad arrow on to Ives Pomeroy, I hope.

JILL. He'd look very nice in knickerbockers—wouldn't he?

Enter AVISA *from door behind bar.*

CODD. What was it you wanted, Jill?

JILL. Morning, ma'am. Just a drop of brandy for my poor man. There's none left. They take Sammy to the 'orspital to-morrow.

AVISA. I'm glad he's going.

JILL. And you did ought to go too, ma'am, by the look of you.

AVISA. [*Getting brandy and pouring it into a smaller bottle.*] Nay, nay; I can stand to work still.

JILL. [*Aside to* AVISA.] I shan't forget that night when you came to me at the Hunter's Cross, ma'am, and showed me my duty. I'm terrible unhappy and terrible sorry for all my sins. I wish I was going to die instead of Sammy.

AVISA. Your life's to live. Hurry back to him. [*Gives* JILL *the bottle.*] No—you needn't pay for it.

JILL. Thank you, ma'am. God bless you for all you've done for me. 'Tis a beastly world and full of unkind folk. I hate everybody in it but you.

[*Exit* JILL.

Enter LIZZIE *from behind bar.*

LIZZIE. Mother, you didn't ought to be down yet. Don't you stop here. Ruth's getting breakfast. [*Kisses* AVISA.] How do you find yourself this morning?

AVISA. I slept very well, my dear.

[*Exeunt* AVISA *and* LIZZIE *through door behind bar.*

[CODD *stops sweeping and looks about. Lifts a paper or two on the mantelshelf; then goes behind bar and looks at other papers hanging on a file.*

Enter IVES. *He is in his shirt and trousers, with his braces round his waist. He carries a towel and a cake of white soap.*

IVES. Morning, Emmanuel.

[CODD *looks at him sourly, but does not speak. He is tidying in the bar.*

IVES. I want you. I've larned something since yesterday.

CODD. There's a lot for you to larn.

IVES. Touching your pension, Codd.

CODD. Call it a "pension"!

IVES. You shall have more than I offered. I've talked it over with mother. 'Twas less than the fair thing. I spoke in haste.

CODD. Your way always.

IVES. Well, well, don't growl no more, for God's sake. We shall soon part.

CODD. I won't thank you for anything, if that's what you're after. I've done my duty in your family for fifty year, and if you and your mother be going to do yours—well, 'tis time—and only the justice you're always talking about.

IVES. You was to have had five shilling a week for your life.

CODD. After fifty year o' work!

IVES. But we're going to give you three half-crowns, Emmanuel.

CODD. Three half-crowns! Justice—eh! Three half-crowns for fifty years' work!

IVES. [*Angry.*] Get out of my sight, then—be gone, you thankless dog!

[CODD, *in fear, hurries out, and* IVES *flings his broom out of the door and kicks a bucket out after him.* RUTH *enters from behind bar.*

RUTH. Anything wrong?

IVES. Everything's wrong. What's the use of trying to meet men? Seven-and-six a week for life, and he—there, why should I bother you about it? How's mother to-day?

RUTH. She's a lot happier ever since you've been back; but we must keep her happy, Ives: the happier she is, the better for her. Peace and calm she must have.

IVES. What more can I do? Haven't I said that I'll be the death of anybody that frets her?

RUTH. She's slept well—and she's taking an egg to her breakfast—I made her.

IVES. You're a proper fairy in this house. And you're only paid with trouble. I wish I was so patient as you. 'Tis the people—the people make me mad. I can be so wise and clever as anybody—when I'm all by myself.

RUTH. I know—I know, Ives. 'Twould be so easy to live—if life didn't come between. 'Tis all a battle.

IVES. [*Helping to tidy the bar.*] That old devil, Codd——

RUTH. Never mind him. Smooth out your forehead.

IVES. I've took to thinking a lot about things lately, Ruth.

RUTH. I know you have.

IVES. Nobody's got more to vex 'em than you, come to think of it.

RUTH. Life's difficult even for the least of us.

IVES. So 'tis for anybody who wants to be honest and straight. I can talk to you because—because you understand things. I like to tell you my secrets. I cared a lot for Jill Wickett, you know. I'd have took her away from that poor sick sheep, her husband. I felt she belonged to me somehow. In justice I felt it. We was running off together; but then I found myself up against justice again. At the last minute, when all was fixed up, I heard how Sammy had lost his uncle's money, and she knew it. She offered to run away with me for craft, not for love; and I hated her then, to think how she'd played with me—hard-hearted bitch. And I paid her in her own coin. Women never forgive the chap that finds 'em out. I met her two days agone, and she looked through me, as if I was a pane o' glass. But she's got to hear me afore long. She's got to know why I did it.

RUTH. I don't think she's the sort to bear malice. Live and let live is her motto.

IVES. You say life's so difficult. I wish 'twas in my power to make it easier for you.

RUTH. How kind to wish that, but——

IVES. One man's the trouble. One man makes it hard—eh, Ruth?

RUTH. Don't be angered with him. He can't see what he's doing—poor Matthew. I think sometimes I ought to go. But your mother——

IVES. 'Tis he ought to go—the long-faced monkey. He's plaguing you to death. Ban't just or fair, and I'm itching to tell him so.

RUTH. Don't, don't dream of it.

IVES. My eyes have been opened a lot of late. There's none to stand up for you.

Enter BROWN.

BROWN. [*Takes off his hat to* RUTH.] Good morning. Not dressed, Ives! Is Lizzie going to see me on my way to school?

RUTH. For certain she is, Mr. Brown.

[*Exit* RUTH *into parlour.*

BROWN. All nature rejoices in the morning sunshine; all nature is up and dressed but you, Ives.

IVES. Oh Arthur, how the devil do you keep so well content with everything that happens?

BROWN. I wish I could teach you the secret of a mind at ease.

IVES. You teach me a deuce of a lot of things—not worth knowing.

BROWN. I'm ready and willing to help everybody. I came into the world to help it.

IVES. You're so terrible good. But good for what? Your virtues would sink a ship; but what do you do? You only teach brats and knock all the joy and fight out of them.

BROWN. I knock the fight out of them, certainly. God never made their little hands to double into fists.

IVES. Well, I can't swear at you no more, though I shall laugh at you till my dying day.

BROWN. Only a fool laughs at a wise man, Ives.

IVES. But a wise man is the first to laugh at himself.

BROWN. Thank God I've never seen anything to laugh at in myself.

IVES. I suppose not.

BROWN. I have my share of self-respect, I believe.

IVES. You have, Arthur—and a bit over.

BROWN. And I know whom to thank for my powers.

IVES. But God and Nature ain't the same. 'Tis a question in my mind which be the stronger.

BROWN. That shows weak faith. Nature is only the servant. Heaven is all-powerful.

[*Enter* MR. CAWKER *with an old fishing creel and a rod in three pieces. He has a cast of trout-flies round his battered hat and carries a bunch of primroses.*

IVES. And the Devil? What's the end of him?

CAWKER. The end of the Devil be his tail, my dear.

IVES. Who believes in him now?

BROWN. All honest Christians. We know the Devil better, that's all. We see through him. We understand his dreadful plots upon the soul. If heaven can be within us, then hell can.

Ives. I know that much.

CAWKER. 'Tis too fine a morning for preaching, schoolmaster.

IVES. I want to see justice done in the world.

BROWN. We are all put here to do it and work for it.

CAWKER. We're put here to play, not work. We're

the Lord's children; and don't a parent like to see his little ones having a romp? We'll grow up in heaven —not here. We're the only creatures that drink when we ain't thirsty; the only creatures that play kiss in the ring; the only creatures that can make a joke and see a joke; the only creatures that know how to tell a good sporting lie and stick to it. Think of all that! Let the beasts that perish work; not us fine things with immortal souls.

BROWN. Work is good physic, if nothing more.

CAWKER. But I don't want no physic. I ain't ill. I only ask to run about and play till I drop. The rich people hate me. Why? Because I will do the same as them, and enjoy myself, and get the full taste of life afore I die.

BROWN. Many, like myself, are only happy when engaged in good works, my poor fellow.

CAWKER. Let 'em work if they want to work. We don't even do that. There's thousands crying for work and the world won't give it to 'em.

BROWN. If all men did what was right in their own eyes, what becomes of the State and the Church and our most cherished institutions, neighbour? You forget that man is a fallen creature, Mr. Cawker. We are all born sinners—remember that.

CAWKER. You may have been; I wasn't. I wasn't born a sinner. I was born a babby—so innocent as any kitten, or puppy, that ever came squeaking into a hard world. I ban't a miserable sinner, schoolmaster; I'm a happy sinner.

BROWN. There's a recording angel, as you'll find to your cost some day, my poor soul.

CAWKER. Of course there is—a large-minded chap, no doubt. And d'you think my little sins are going to bother him? A few birds with uncertain owners; and a few salmon coming up from the sea, and a few jokes against my betters, including my Maker—what is it after all? Just schoolboy naughtiness! And won't the angel know it?

[*Enter* AVISA *and* LIZZIE. LIZZIE *has her sunbonnet on. She comes through hatch of bar.* BROWN *raises his hat to her and bows.* AVISA *stops behind bar.*

CAWKER. Good morning—good morning, ma'am. Your soul shines through your body like the moon through a ghost! I've fetched along these here primrosen for 'e—picked with my own honest hand.

[BROWN *shakes his head to* LIZZIE *and they go out together.*

AVISA. Thank you, Moleskin.

[*Smells the flowers and smiles at them*

CAWKER. With all the dew of the morning on 'em; and now I be wanting a drop o' dew myself.

IVES. Scotch mist, I reckon.

[*Gives him a drink from the little barrel.* AVISA *sits by the fire. She is very weak.*

CAWKER. Pretty drinking! I'll fetch 'e a few sizable trout coming home-along, Avisa. You make her eat 'em, Ives. [*Exit* CAWKER.

AVISA. Don your coat, my dear, and get your breakfast.

IVES. Here's Ruth. You mustn't do no work, mother.

AVISA. I'm very well to-day.

Enter RUTH.

RUTH. Your food's in the fender to keep warm, Ives.

[IVES *nods and goes behind bar.* RUTH *crosses to* AVISA *and lifts the cushions in her chair.*

AVISA. Talk to me a minute, Ruth.

RUTH. How do you feel to-day?

AVISA. The tide be ebbing. I wish—I wish; but 'tis only selfishness. How's Northmore?

RUTH. Just the same.

AVISA. A young chap gets over his love troubles; but such as him—after love's once melted 'em into its mould there's no changing. They'll break, but they can't thaw. I'm very sad for him.

Enter BUTCHER'S BOY.

BOY. Half a pint o' bitter, please, miss.

RUTH. [*Serves him.*] Hullo, Teddy!

BOY. I be going to kill two o' Mr. Northmore's pigs. Just the day for it! [*Drinks.*] Gude morning, miss.

[*Pays for his drink.* RUTH *nods to him.*

[*Exit* BOY *whistling.*

RUTH. [*To* AVISA.] Did I ought to go from here?

AVISA. 'Tis hard to say that. You know what's in my heart. [*Pause.*] The greatest good to Ives. [*Earnestly.*] Go on loving him, for God's sake! Never stop loving him. Oh, woman, he's better than you know! There's good growing in him, like the corn in the earth. 'Tis the weak seedling be best worth tending, for it do often bring the loveliest flower. Much of him be hid from the world, but not from me. He's done proper things that only I know about. He's fighting a good fight. 'Tis my joy to know that you love him so steadfast, and that you could forgive me for finding it out. But no maid could have hid that from a mother's eyes.

Enter GEORGE BONUS.

BONUS. Morning—morning! The usual, please. The weather be going to turn thirsty, I do believe.

AVISA. How's Samuel?

[RUTH *draws beer for* BONUS.

BONUS. Very near died last night—so his wife says. We take him to Tavistock to-morrow, and he'll never come back no more; but he thinks he will, poor toad. Don't know death when he sees it staring at him. His eyes be blinded a' purpose, by the goodness of the Lord. [*Drinks.*] Well, so long. [*Exit* BONUS.

AVISA. I'm a terrible selfish woman where my boy's the matter; but you can forgive me that, Ruth.

RUTH. Forgive you! I'd give my life for you.

AVISA. You can help me now, because you're so

strong and I'm gone so weak. There's no nature in me no more. Be there anything I ought to do? Be there any mortal thing I've missed for him and left undone that's in my power? I often puzzle of a night thinking on it.

RUTH. No—no—'tis very certain you've forgot nothing.

AVISA. There's nought jogs your memory like love. [*Smiling.*] There'll be a good few little surprises for him when I go. I've trusted him in everything, you know, Ruth. He'll feel my perfect trust, won't he? [RUTH *nods.*] 'Tis a great thing for the young to be trusted. It builds up their proper pride. When I was a little wee girl, if my mother trusted me with a parcel, I'd be so proud as a peacock. Go I must, and quickly now, yet I feel 'tis too soon to go from him, Ruth.

RUTH. Don't talk of going—don't think of it.

AVISA. [*Smiling.*] But there—'tis always too soon for a mother to leave her boy. [RUTH *goes over and kisses her. She takes* RUTH'S *hand.*] Be brave and watchful, and, above all, patient. For my sake you will, Ruth?

RUTH. That I will.

AVISA. [*Smiling and taking* RUTH'S *arm.*] God bless you. I wish I could help you too. But we poor women—there's only one rule for us—to put on a brave face and hide our hearts.

[*Exeunt* AVISA *and* RUTH *through the door at back of bar.*

Enter NORTHMORE *and* EMMANUEL CODD.

CODD. Yes, I be off—after more than fifty year. 'Tis his wicked work. He hates truth and honesty and all I stand for; but I'll defy the wretch to his face so long as my tongue can move in my mouth.

NORTHMORE. I heard he was mending and going straight.

CODD. Mending—do a wolf mend?

NORTHMORE. They change their hair—not their hearts, 'tis said.

CODD. A liar and treacherous as the river—laughs at everything that's holy and right—cares nought that his mother be dropping into her grave afore his very eyes. A limb of Satan he is, and don't you trust him, for he's no friend to you, or any other honest man.

Enter RUTH *from behind bar.*

RUTH. Good morning, Matthew. [*Exit* CODD.

[NORTHMORE *shakes her hand without speaking, but looks at her with burning eyes and the unreasoning expression of a fanatic.*

RUTH. 'Tis a beautiful morning.

NORTHMORE. Have you thought of what I said yesterday? Don't put it away—don't forget it. You can't do that. 'Tisn't selfishness in me. I'd live for you if I could; but if that's not to be, I'll die for you. I'm past the selfish stage. I only want

you to be happy and safe and out of reach of them that would do you harm.

RUTH. I know, I know you mean nought but kindness to me, and always have.

NORTHMORE. Then trust me. Leave this place and go out of reach of them all. I hate you to be here—amid coarse, common people. I hate you to serve beer to ploughboys and hear all their beastly talk.

RUTH. You don't know the many reasons—there's Mrs. Pomeroy.

NORTHMORE. Then stop within reach of her. And let me stand between you and the rest. Let me come between. Say "yes" to me, Ruth—say "yes" to me. I beseech it, I implore it! Then you can bide and take care of her while she's so ill. But let me be the shield and the tower of strength; for God's sake, Ruth—for God's sake! [*Takes her hand and kisses it.*

RUTH. [*Withdrawing her hand.*] Oh Matthew—you'll break my heart! [*Weeps bitterly. She has her face down between her hands on the counter, and he lifts his hands over her head yearningly, as though to bless her.*]

Enter IVES *from outer door. He is now completely attired.*

IVES. What's wrong, Ruth? [*To* NORTHMORE.] You again? Haven't you got more sense?

NORTHMORE. I'll not speak to you.

IVES. Then listen to me. Do you know what

you're doing? Have you eyes in your head? Let that woman be cheerful for a moment, and you cloud her; let her find a spark o' joy and you come and put it out. [*Exit* RUTH *through door behind bar.*] You frighten her—like a bully frightens his horse—She doesn't know which way to turn. She— You're no man to do it; and, love her or not, you——

NORTHMORE. [*Furiously.*] Shut your mouth! How dare you talk to me—the likes of you! Is the girl your business—damn you? She's an angel from heaven—that's what she is. How can a thing like you measure a woman like her?

IVES. [*Steadied.*] No; I don't know how good she is. No man knows how good a woman can be. She bides here for my mother's sake—only for that—and she's got no chap to take care of her and warn off them that ban't wanted, so I mean to.

NORTHMORE. You—you canting, crooked-minded trash—you to preach to me! Who are you to dare—? If she understood the truth of you—Herd with your evil kind—you that run after other men's wives!

IVES. Better that than torment a maiden who hates your shadow! Look in your glass, you grey-haired fool! Clear out of this and never come back no more, or I'll hit you down!

NORTHMORE. [*His temper gone.*] You gaol-bird! Touch me, would you? I'm not too old to——

[*Strikes* POMEROY *across the cheek with his whip, as* AVISA *enters from behind the bar.*

IVES *flies at his throat.* AVISA *thrusts between them. They fall apart.*

AVISA. Are you men, or wicked children?

IVES. Keep away!

AVISA. [*Struggling with* IVES.] He's old enough to be your father!

IVES. [*Falling back.*] Them that can give blows can take them.

NORTHMORE. Let him come.

AVISA. [*To* NORTHMORE.] You'll rue this to your dying day.

NORTHMORE. He laughs at my grey hairs—but not at my whip.

IVES. Liar! I never laughed . . . I only——

NORTHMORE. I'd kill you for this if I could!

IVES. You'll kill a woman—not a man.

NORTHMORE. Good God, I——

[*He starts forward and* AVISA *holds his whip and drags it out of his hand.*

AVISA. Shame on you, Matthew!

NORTHMORE. This dirt to preach to me.

AVISA. Shame, I say—what right have you——?

NORTHMORE. Woman, you don't know——

IVES. If you're too old to thrash, you're not too old to hear.

AVISA. List to me——

IVES. Don't hold him, mother. I'll not touch him I'll only smite his ears with truth. Ruth Rendle hates and loathes the man.

NORTHMORE. Am I to suffer this?

[*Starts forward.* AVISA *holds him.* IVES *crosses his arms and doesn't move.*

IVES. Hit me again on t'other cheek. You've got it in your heart.

AVISA. [*Putting an arm on* NORTHMORE'S *shoulder and holding his clenched fist.*] Heed me, heed me, for Christ's sake! Ruth never hated no man. Not built to hate. You're wicked to let Nature break loose from sense.

NORTHMORE. There's some things no decent dog would do.

IVES. And you've done 'em!

NORTHMORE. You poisonous wretch!

AVISA. [*Again coming between them.*] Afore God I order you to cease! [*To* NORTHMORE.] Can such as you—a man that's been a pattern to his neighbours—? No, you shan't go, Matthew; this shan't stop here.

IVES. Let him go and hide himself.

AVISA. Speak no more evil against him. 'Tis you should hide. The man was in his right to come here—where all are welcome.

IVES. Was he in his right to torture a defenceless——?

NORTHMORE. Stop him—shut his mouth, or I won't answer for myself.

AVISA. [*To* IVES.] Give heed to me, while I can speak. For my words will soon be numbered. This man was here on a sacred errand. I name it as I'd

name any other holy thing. You've wounded his heart, but it shan't fester. To Ruth he came——

NORTHMORE. Keep that off your lips, Widow Pomeroy. That's not your business.

AVISA. I'm saying it isn't, Matthew. A secret, sacred thing, between you and her; and for my son to thrust in was madness.

IVES. Let me be mad if he's sane.

AVISA. He answered a boy's folly with a man's anger. 'Tis all the point of view.

IVES. Who'd see a girl sobbing her heart out and not thrust in to help her?

AVISA. If he made Ruth weep, 'twas for other reasons than you know. She's a woman, and woman's tears oft sink deeper than sorrow, and go higher than joy.

NORTHMORE. You were a thief and would be again. This girl—what's she to you? Is she your woman? Since we are to strip hearts, I'll strip mine for your mother's eyes, that know no evil. [*To* AVISA.] I love her and I'm striving with all my poor might to make her love me.

IVES. Love!

NORTHMORE. A sort of love you'll never reach to, nor feel, nor fathom.

IVES. To give a woman hell be a funny sort of way to love her.

NORTHMORE. Not hell—I'd give her heaven if I could, and she'll live to know it. I'm the right and proper man for her. Afore God I am.

AVISA. Then between you and her and her God it lies.

NORTHMORE. 'Tis very strange to speak such things to any living creature. [*To* AVISA.] But you know men. You understand. [*To* IVES.] You angered me past bearing. I forgot your rash nature. You don't know what you do and rush in where angels wouldn't.

AVISA. Leave it there. Our feet stand firm again. My boy made a mistake and he's paid.

IVES. I went to work wrong. I grant that. My business wasn't with you.

NORTHMORE. Then I'll not say less. I'm sorry I fell upon you. I ask you to pardon me.

IVES. I earned it.

NORTHMORE. You're young and strong and your life's ahead of you. The young can afford to forgive. The world's to the young. Passion and hot blood's proper to you. You can carry them, but I—I'm sorry I forgot my age.

[*Holds out his hand.* IVES *takes it.*

IVES. I'm sorry too. 'Twasn't the proper way. I'd no right to come between you—not like that. Forgive me.

NORTHMORE. Anything but there—I'll yield all else but in that quarter. I'm a very patient man—save there. But she—she's above reason—and law—and religion. She's my life. There's nothing in the world that matters but her. I'll atone for striking

you. I'll give myself up if you say so. I'll go before the Justices and be punished for that blow.

IVES. [*Laughing.*] Get home, Matthew, or they'll say you're as mad as me.

NORTHMORE. I'll do good things to you. [*To* AVISA.] I shan't forget this. I'll be his faithful friend.

AVISA. I know it, Matthew, I know it.

[IVES *gives* NORTHMORE *his whip.*

NORTHMORE. I'll do good things, I tell you.

[*Exit* NORTHMORE.

IVES. Poor devil. I'm sorry for him. 'Tis he that's the madman. Thank God you came in, mother, or I should have——

AVISA. Help me! I'm gone weak—I——

[*She falls into his arms and he supports her to her chair.*

IVES. There — there — you're better — say you're better. [*Hastens to bring her drink.*

AVISA. 'Tis nothing. No—I don't want no drink. My boy's my drink. You was patient and brave. I'm proud of you.

IVES. [*Rubbing his cheek.*] I'm learning. Be you better? Your face is awful grey. Just a little drop to please me.

AVISA. [*She drinks.*] Kneel down here a minute. 'Tis well with me, but I can't be here much longer. And full of trust I go—full of trust in you, sonny.

IVES. I've shortened your life—I know that bitter well.

AVISA. You've kept me alive. For you I've gone

on living. But I shan't be far off when I go. The Lord won't take me out of reach of my boy.

IVES. You mustn't go till I've made amends. I can't live without you, mother! [*Pause.*

AVISA. Poor man—poor Matthew. Be gentle and patient with him. He's got to suffer a lot yet.

IVES. Terrible what he feels for her. A tearing, raging thing. His eyes burn when he names her. Can love eat a man alive like that? Poor Ruth! Too good she is even for him—such a wonder as her.

AVISA. She's a very proper girl, and dear to me.

IVES. You always know what a man or woman's good for. You're always right. I've tried to learn a bit from young Ruth.

AVISA. She can teach most men more than they know.

IVES. And more than they thought to know sometimes.

AVISA. She's good to look on.

IVES. I couldn't speak it afore that man. But sometimes—if I dared——

AVISA. [*Concealing interest.*] If ——?

IVES. [*Nods.*] But I don't dare.

AVISA. 'Tis a great thought, Ives.

IVES. She knows too much about me, I reckon.

AVISA. 'Tis them that know but half of you are your enemies. She knows all.

IVES. Who could hope aught for me but you? Who could put faith in me but you?

AVISA. There s always a way for faith and hope—if love be there to light 'em, sonny,

[*She puts her arms round* IVES *and kisses him.*

CURTAIN

ACT IV

Scene: *The parlour of "The Green Man." Some slight alterations in the room have occurred since the events of the first act. There is a big black and white crayon enlargement of a photograph of* Avisa Pomeroy *on the mantelpiece, in an ugly gold frame. The time is evening, but the inn has not yet closed.*

Lizzie *is discovered. She is clad in black. She goes to door and admits* Mr. Cawker.

Cawker. Is Policeman Toop here? He's coming to see Ives about the fire. How's the boy going on now?

Lizzie. His hand is near well, Mr. Cawker.

Cawker. I mean his heart, poor chap.

Lizzie. After mother died he couldn't look forward and couldn't look back. 'Twas terrible. Then he fell deadly silent. Ruth and I were thankful to the fire at Stone Park, for it seemed to wake him up and bring him back to life again.

Cawker. 'Tis one of God's kindest tricks to help us to forget. Your best friend dies, and you think the world's coming to an end. But it don't, and afore

you can look round, you catch yourself laughing and drinking, just as you did when your friend was alive. The places of the dead be filled up, Lizzie, afore the moss have crept to their gravestones.

LIZZIE. Not always.

CAWKER. I miss your mother cruel every time I come into "The Green Man." 'Twas here she suffered and here she shone. A very rare sort of a woman she was. I know a bit about 'em. She was built on the grand fashion. How she worked for him—your brother. I've seen her weave that chap and Ruth Rendle together with her eyes—back and forth like a flying shuttle—to entangle their hearts if she could.

LIZZIE. [*Nods.*] It will happen. Ruth goes to-morrow; but I think she will be back before long.

Enter IVES *and* BONUS.

LIZZIE. Mr. Cawker to meet Policeman Toop, Ives.

IVES. [*He wears a black band on his coat sleeve and has a quiet and resigned air. One hand is tied up in a bandage.*] See how the new potman's getting on, will 'e. [*Exit* LIZZIE *into bar. To* CAWKER.] We was talking of the fire, Moleskin. If George had only been about, we should have saved 'em; but the damned blackguard who did that bit o' work knew very well the place was empty.

CAWKER. Toop be full of a clue. He's coming in to tell you presently.

BONUS. A cruel calamity.

IVES. The cry of those creatures! Where's

justice? Where was God A'mighty, Moleskin, when those calves were burning to death?

CAWKER. The devil doubles on God sometimes—like the fox doubles on the hounds.

BONUS. I don't know nothing about the devil; but I do know they calves had "Sultan" for a sire, and was worth thirty pound apiece.

CAWKER. How's Northmore took the trouble?

BONUS. I be doubtful sometimes if he ain't going weak in his head.

CAWKER. Drinks now and be wild after a woman. What more can you ask of any honest man? He's your friend ain't he, Ives?

IVES. Be blessed if I know. You'd reckon he ought to be. We made it up for good and all—'twas my mother brought us together three days afore she died. And I was glad to be the one to discover the fire and do my best. But he never even thanked me for what I done.

BONUS. Didn't your arm in a sling speak?

CAWKER. And your mother's death and all?

IVES. 'Tis strange, but she don't seem so dead as she was a month ago. She's more alive to me than half the people in the world.

CAWKER. And well she may be! [*Looks at the picture on the mantelshelf.*] Some be living though in their graves, and some be dead all the days of their life.

IVES. She said that she wouldn't go very far off. I was planting flowers on her mound t'other day. I

could almost hear her heart beating under the grass. [*Pause.*] Come in the bar you chaps, and have a drink.

[*They all go through door into bar. A moment later* LIZZIE *comes in from bar and as she does so there is a knock at the door. She goes to it and admits* JILL WICKETT.

JILL. Good evening, miss. 'Tis Miss Rendle I must see—Mr. Northmore have sent me.

LIZZIE. She's busy packing just now.

JILL. I can wait. There's no hurry.

LIZZIE. I'll tell her, Jill. [*Exit* LIZZIE *upstairs.*

[JILL *looks about her, regards the portrait of* MRS. POMEROY *and other portraits on the walls. Picks up a small Bible from the table and puts it down again in a different place by a chair. There is a knock at the door, but nobody answers it. The knock is repeated, and* JILL *goes to the door.* NICHOLAS TOOP *appears.*

TOOP. Hullo! You!

JILL. Yes, me.

TOOP. I'd rather meet you anywhere but here.

JILL. Why?

TOOP. There's talk.

JILL. And if there is, what's that to you?

TOOP. I'm a policeman, ain't I?

JILL. Ah, 'tis talk you mostly go on. Don't you believe all you hear, Mr. Toop.

TOOP. Ives Pomeroy——

JILL. I ban't here to see him, if that's what you mean. He's nought to me, nor me to him. That's all over long ago.

TOOP. Honest?

JILL. God's my judge. [*Looking at him out of the corner of her eye.*] I shall be a lonely woman pretty soon, without a soul to care for me.

TOOP. Don't say that. I could name a rising young man—I've got a clue to the fire at Stone Park. Single-handed I found it!

JILL. We all know what a clever chap you are. Anybody in these parts?

TOOP. No, no. Us don't do that sort of thing here. A tramp—a foreigner from Exeter. How's your Sammy?

JILL. Flickering like a night-light, that wants to go out and can't.

TOOP. 'Tis the way of a policeman to look all round a thing; and you'll excuse me for naming the subject, but I've looked all round you, Mrs. Wickett.

JILL. Well, I be so good one side as t'other, I believe.

TOOP. You're a masterpiece and who doubts it? But poor Sammy will be gone afore we can blow our noses; and the men will be after you, like hawks after a linnet.

JILL. Not they! Who wants a [poor dairymaid, without a penny in her pocket?

TOOP. You've seen more'n your share of trouble, I reckon.

JILL. So I have then. I've had everybody against me. And I've made trouble, too, though God knows I'm innocent of it as a babe unborn.

TOOP. You wouldn't hurt a fly, I'm sure.

JILL. No, I wouldn't—unless it hurt me first. I can't be hit without trying to hit back.

TOOP. Of course. That's your brave nature.

JILL. I met Ives Pomeroy back along, after his mother's death, and we had it out. I tell you these things because you're a kind man and a fine man, and wouldn't do a friendless woman any harm.

TOOP. Had what out?

JILL. A quarrel. He used me shameful and I hit back; but now 'tis all over and we understand each other. And, of course, if such a chap as you is going to be my friend, I don't want to make trouble for other people.

TOOP. You women must be speaking in riddles.

JILL. I only want to do as I be done by, Nicholas.

TOOP. I warrant I could make you happy, Jill.

JILL. I daresay you could if you was to try. Be your lungs all right?

TOOP. [*Striking his breast.*] Sound as a hoss!

JILL. I like you well enough for that matter. You're a man, and what's more, you're a policeman. I might be safer along with a policeman, I reckon—a helpless, simple creature like me.

TOOP. Such a clever woman would be a tower of strength to me, Jill.

JILL. [*Considering.*] Suppose I was to tell you that your clue to the fire was all wrong, Nicholas?

TOOP. What?

[RUTH *and* LIZZIE *descend stairs together.*

RUTH. I'm so sorry, Jill, but——

JILL. 'Tis no odds, I had company. [*To* RUTH *aside.*] Mr. Northmore be riding up this evening afore ten o'clock. 'Tis very special indeed, and he'll thank you to see him—alone.

RUTH. Yes, Jill.

Enter BROWN. *He carries an umbrella.*

BROWN. Am I *de trop?*

TOOP. [*To* JILL.] Come out along with me. I want to hear a bit more about this. [*To* LIZZIE.] You might tell your brother that I've called, miss, but that nought is certain yet. There's mysteries in the air. About the fire I mean.

LIZZIE. I'll tell him, Mr. Toop.

[*Exeunt* TOOP *and* JILL WICKETT.

BROWN. Why isn't that woman at her husband's death-bed? [*Exit* RUTH *upstairs.*

LIZZIE. You're late, dear Arthur.

BROWN. [*Takes out watch.*] I think not, Lizzie. But my visit must be short this evening.

LIZZIE. Oh, dear! Shall I get the dominoes?

BROWN. [*Sitting by the small Bible that* JILL *moved.*]

No, I am not in the mood for games of skill to-night. We will talk. I have been looking ahead.

[*Picks up the little Bible at his elbow.*

LIZZIE. [*Sitting some distance from him.*] You always look ahead.

BROWN. Have you nothing to occupy your fingers, Lizzie?

[LIZZIE *rises, gets some work, and returns to her seat.*

BROWN. [*Turning over the leaves of the book.*] Your mother's Bible, I see.

LIZZIE. Yes, her little one. She's left it to Ruth in her will.

BROWN. Her will caused me a great deal of surprise. However—the book is well thumbed. She was a pious woman—according to her lights.

LIZZIE. Dear mother never talked about it.

BROWN. A great mistake. We should wave the flag of Faith vigorously for all to see—both in and out of season. [*He puts the Bible down beside him.*

LIZZIE. You're so brave, Arthur.

BROWN. Yes, I am brave. And I am also patient. Still patience can be pushed too far, Lizzie. Our nuptials must be celebrated this autumn—I don't propose to wait after the first of October.

LIZZIE. You darling! As soon as ever Ives——

BROWN. I recognize his position. But the future husband must not be sacrificed to the brother.

LIZZIE. No, no. He's so different now—so good and gentle.

BROWN. Always gardening on his mother's grave, I hear. I hope the solemn experience of his parent's death is not merely seed sown on stony ground—I do hope not. It is now eight weeks since the interment, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. Nine, Arthur.

BROWN. Pardon me—eight, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. [*Reflects.*] You're right, of course. I do believe you're faultless, Arthur! It must be so hard for you to feel how different everybody else is.

BROWN. They needn't be—they needn't be. And indeed I'm not faultless—far from that, Lizzie. My weakness is intellectual pride. I catch myself occasionally exulting in my brain power. As for Ives—remorse is a very healthy emotion, though I believe a painful one. Thank God, I was never called to feel it.

[*Enter* IVES *from the bar. He looks at them, sitting far apart, and a passing grin touches his face.*

IVES. Still spooning! What a fiery old devil you are, Arthur.

BROWN. There is an embrace of the soul, Ives. And please don't call me "a fiery old devil."

IVES. But you ought to cuddle her now and again—just for practice.

BROWN. Self-discipline — self-discipline, my poor fellow. [*Gets up and takes his hat.*] Lizzie will tell you that we are not above temporal considerations. I have decided that we wed in the autumn.

IVES. Wait for the frosts! Yours did ought to be a snowy wedding.

LIZZIE. Don't, don't say that, Ives!

BROWN. Good night, dearest one.

[*Kisses* LIZZIE *on the forehead.*

IVES. Well done, Arthur! Afore me too!

BROWN. If we fear not God's eyes, why should we fear a sinful man's?

[*Exit* BROWN.

IVES. Well, you'll have the most wonderful thing that ever walked this earth in a pair of black trousers, my dinky girl!

LIZZIE. He's forgotten his umbrella—fancy that!

[*Takes it and hastens after* BROWN. RUTH *descends the stairs.*

IVES. Done your packing?

RUTH. Very nearly. Where's my little Bible your dear mother gave me? [*Seeks where it was and fails to find it.*] It was here.

IVES. [*At door.*] When I look down on the village I seem to see all mother in one glance, Ruth.

RUTH. Light and warmth she was to them that knew her.

IVES. And now the lamp be out.

RUTH. Only lifted higher, Ives.

[*Seeks Bible but does not find it.*

IVES. 'Tis us be struck to death, not her. Oh, Ruth, Ruth, and me a bad son to her! That rare mother to have such dross for a son— [*Shuts the door and comes in.*] Her work's over. Her beautiful deeds are

all ended now. 'Twas good for the earth that she came on it, Ruth.

RUTH. [*Nods.*] 'Tis sacred ground to us where she went.

IVES. Ruth—now or never—I want—I want to tell you—afore you go. [*A knock at door.*

RUTH. Mr. Northmore to see me, I reckon.

[*Goes to door.*

IVES. Him!

RUTH. [*Returning from door before she opens it.*] Don't go. Speak to him a minute. I want you to—You—you shall talk to me after—if you must.

IVES. You promise?

RUTH. I promise.

[*Goes to door and lets in* NORTHMORE.

IVES. [*In a friendly spirit.*] Here's the man! Come in, Matthew, and— [*Holds out his hand.*] I'm cruel sorry for your trouble.

NORTHMORE. [*Not taking his hand.*] Are you? [*Shaking his head.*

RUTH. He burned himself all up the arm trying to save your calves, Matthew.

IVES. That was nought. I'm only sorry I come too late. The man that did that job ought to swing for it.

NORTHMORE. You're a hard case, Pomeroy.

RUTH. Matthew!

NORTHMORE. 'Tis all I'll answer. I don't want his friendship. Let him keep away. [*To* IVES.] That's all I ask of you.

IVES. Can you remember the past and say that?

NORTHMORE. It is because I remember the past too well. Couldn't your mother's ghost save you from——?

IVES. [*Angry.*] Keep her off your lips—and me too! For her sake I've done what I did. For her sake I've said no word against your brutal silence. And let this woman witness it. And now be damned to you for a hard-hearted, frozen wretch! I'd sooner home with the foxes than with you.

[*Exit* IVES *into bar.*

RUTH. How could you serve him so?

NORTHMORE. I hate a hypocrite.

RUTH. He's not that, and never was.

NORTHMORE. A hypocrite, and a liar, and bad—bad all through. There's mighty matters afore you now. And ask no mercy for that man, for I'll show none—unless—good money gone—precious beasts destroyed devilish work——

RUTH. Who mourns it more than him? 'Twas only thanks to him that worse didn't happen. He fought the fire for you; he suffered for you; and you couldn't even thank him.

NORTHMORE. [*Wildly.*] The Lord's behind this thing. He's forced your hand, Ruth. The man who set my farm afire was Ives Pomeroy——

RUTH. [*Expresses amazement, which dwindles down into amusement and scorn.*] You're mad! What will you say next, Matthew?

NORTHMORE. Don't laugh, for God's sake. 'Tis no laughing matter.

RUTH. I do laugh ; because you're fooling yourself. I'd sooner believe you'd done it than him.

NORTHMORE. Facts are facts. It's true. He did it.

RUTH. Never—not if an angel said he did.

NORTHMORE. Be just to others as well as generous to him. Listen, and if I say wrong, show me where. On the night of the fire Stone Park was empty, and he knew it would be, for Bonus told him so. 'Twas he, returning from Amicombe Hill, raised the alarm of fire.

RUTH. What more could he do?

NORTHMORE. He could light it first. Look on these things.

[*Brings a large pocket-book from his pocket and produces from it some half-burned papers.*

RUTH. [*Taking papers.*] A piece of a bill from Forster's and—and a bit of a letter I wrote Ives when he went away after the funeral.

NORTHMORE. You didn't think he'd use one of your letters to set my farm alight!

RUTH. What more?

NORTHMORE. D'you want more?

RUTH. Who gave you these?

NORTHMORE. I found them myself. It's proof positive. [*He takes a fancy match-box from his pocket.*] Whose is this?

RUTH. My gift to him on his last birthday. I know he uses it.

NORTHMORE. Yes—he uses it. [*Pause.*] Be just to me. You thought I was babbling just now; but I wasn't. This means—what? There are only three people in the world know that Pomeroy's a wicked scoundrel, and not one more need ever know it. Ruth, I want you, and I swear to God I believe it will be your eternal salvation to come to me. You can save two men before to-morrow. He said that I bullied you sometimes. Never till now; but now—call it what you like. I'm not proud no more. Starving men aren't proud. You must marry me, Ruth; and if I didn't know that you'll live to bless the day when you do, I'd not set this before you. Cruel to be kind. If he's to go free—say so. If he's to have another chance, 'tis only you can give it him.

[*She stares and exhibits acute emotion. The paper and box fall to the ground.* NORTHMORE *picks them up.*

NORTHMORE. Don't think I've come to this easily. I've spent endless night watches on my knees afore my God about it. You love the man—for his mother's sake. Well, these things are all that stand between him and ruin. [*Gives papers and match-box to her.*] There—take 'em. Give him another chance to make good his mother's prayers; be true to him and you'll be true to me, Ruth. I know 'tis your love for him will make you take me, and that's wormwood; but I'll suffer even that, because I'm strong, and patient, and look forward to the time when you'll

love me better than ever you loved him. I'll make you.

RUTH. Can you do this?

NORTHMORE. I must. 'Tis as clear to me as if my Maker had spoke it.

RUTH. Think before you call a woman to such a thing.

NORTHMORE. Haven't I thought? Haven't I fought? Look at my face, Ruth.

RUTH. He never did it. I know him better than you do. It is impossible that man could have done it.

NORTHMORE. Nothing's impossible if it has happened. "You know him"! Do the song-bird know the snake? Little—little you know him!

[RUTH *is greatly moved. For a few moments she sits down. He walks restlessly about, goes to the window and looks out. She becomes conscious of the things in her hands and idly turns them over. She stares at them, plays with the match-box, opens it, strikes a match and lets it burn out.*

RUTH. He never did it!

NORTHMORE. 'Tis proof positive, I tell you. He did it as sure's God's in heaven.

[RUTH *lights another match and after considering sets fire to the papers.* NORTHMORE *turns round and sees what she is doing. He exhibits great joy and hurries forward.*

NORTHMORE. Ruth! My darling Ruth! you mean it?

RUTH. [*Watches paper burn away. Then she takes match-box and flings it into the fire.*] I mean it.

[NORTHMORE *folds her in his arms and utters a wild, inarticulate cry, half sob, half scream. He now grows incoherent.*

NORTHMORE. Thank God! Thank God! Salvation—salvation! You were born to save lives. [*Kneels down and kisses her dress.*] But 'tis God I must kneel to—not to you—not now. [*Rises.*] We'll save that poor boy between us; we'll help on his mother's work; we'll—we'll— Life! Life out of these ashes. Good-bye—God bless you—Goodness is where you go for ever. It trails after you, like the scent of the fern. Let me get away into the night—to shout it out in lonely places. Let the whole world hear it! My darling wife, my own darling wife!

[*Exit* NORTHMORE. RUTH *sits down and hides her face in her hands.*

Enter LIZZIE.

LIZZIE. Closing time. Why! What's the matter, Ruth?

RUTH. [*Starting up.*] Great news—grand news for me. I'll tell you to-morrow.

LIZZIE. It's made you shake and go as white as paper! You look as though—where's Ives?

[*Goes to door into bar and opens it. A babel of voices from bar.*

CAWKER. [*Singing off.*]

"Oh, when I first see Minnie Bell
My heart began to throb, boys,
But she told me to go to——"

IVES. [*Off.*] Shut up, Moleskin, and clear out—'tis closing time.

LIZZIE. [*Returns to* RUTH.] I'm sure there's something troubling you.

[RUTH *shakes her head. Laughter and loud voices from the bar.*

IVES. [*Off.*[Give Moleskin an arm down the hill, George Bonus; he's bosky-eyed.

CAWKER. [*Off.*] Here's George be turned into twins. They can each take an arm. "Oh, when I first see Minnie Bell——"

IVES. [*Off.*] Good night, good night, all!

RUTH. I can't find the little Bible, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. How we shall miss you, Ruth. But—but—I hope——

Enter IVES.

IVES. That new potman's no good. You be off to bed, Lizzie. I want to talk to Ruth.

LIZZIE. Good night, dear Ives. [*Kisses* IVES.] Good night, dear Ruth. [*Kisses* RUTH.

[*Exit* LIZZIE *upstairs.*

IVES. At last. Sit you here now.

[RUTH, *who is in a sort of dream, obeys him, and finds the book that she has been seeking.*

RUTH. Why, here it is!

IVES. Ruth, I meant to say this a month ago—on the day you decided to be off; but I hadn't the cheek. What's wrong? You be wisht to-night. Is it because you're sorry to go?

RUTH. No, no—I'm full of great news—wonderful news.

IVES. So be I. I've been near telling it for half a dozen weeks, but feared to. So sweet and comely as you are, and me such a useless, cranky dog—that I didn't dare. But I loved you long before mother died, Ruth. And more and more ever since—more and more. Be it too late? D'you know too much about all the wicked things I've done? Can you forgive 'em? [*Goes to her.*] Maybe not. But I'll try terrible hard to rise to be good enough for you, if you'll but——

RUTH. I've promised to marry Matthew Northmore, Ives.

IVES. Northmore! Good God Almighty! You can't abide the man!

RUTH. He's faithful and strong and patient. He's won me, and marry him I shall.

IVES. Why? I've a right to know that. It's whispered of late he's going weak in his head. Has he turned you as mad as himself?

RUTH. 'Tis vain speaking against him. He's not mad. I've promised willingly.

IVES. You're a dishonest woman, then. Yes, Ruth. You've kept him on and off, and broke his heart, and drove him to drink, and now—'tis all wrong—

wickedly wrong, and you shan't do it. You shan't wed that broken man. I swear it. I'll swing for him sooner.

RUTH. Ives—Ives!

IVES. [*Angry.*] Never shall you take him! Do you think I'm mad too? D'you think I can't see there's more in this than you'll tell me? I'll have the truth from you, or else I'll strangle it out of him. God's my judge I'll end his days afore he shall touch you.

RUTH. Don't, don't talk that way! I'm doing what I know to be right and wise.

[*Rises and picks up the Bible.*

IVES. To hell with the whole pack of you! To hell with your gentle looks! To hell with what you made my poor mother hope, and what she whispered to me one hour before she died. 'Twas thus with t'other one; and now 'tis you——

RUTH. [*Going to him.*] This isn't, Ives; this isn't——

IVES. [*Snatching Bible away from her.*] Don't you touch that book while you lie to me and say you're doing right to wed that man! The blood in your veins is crying out that 'tis a lie! 'Tis natural you should hate me—but, my God, you shan't love him! Blast the Book and—and— [*He flings it violently to the ground.*] Let it rot there, if it can't keep you from lying!

RUTH. Your mother's Bible, Ives.

IVES. [*More gently.*] Ruth, Ruth, don't say you love him, for I know 'tis false. And if you don't love

him, how can the honest likes of you wed him? Think better of it. Forget me—I'm worthless and I know it. But don't go to him. 'Tis ruination if you do that.

[RUTH *picks up the book, which has come out of its cover. She also picks up a paper that has fallen out of it.*

IVES. [*More gently.*] I must choke you off Northmore—not for my sake but your own. I—I didn't mean to rage. I'm sorry. I forgot where I stand.

RUTH. [*She is looking at the paper that fell out of the Bible.*] Have you seen this?

IVES. I be only set on your good now—'tis only for you, Ruth.

RUTH. You must read this paper. 'Twill mean a lot to you.

IVES. My mother loved you, Ruth, and——

RUTH. I know that.

IVES. If she was here——

RUTH. She is here! List to her, Ives! Forget me and think 'tis her speaking to you—words all copied from the Book.

IVES. She would never have let you do this.

[*He walks about in deep distress.*

RUTH. Listen—listen what your mother set down. 'Twas not for nought it came to us to-night, dear Ives. [*She goes to lamp.*] The first page is old—as old as you are. [*Reads slowly.*] "*God hath judged me and hath heard my voice and hath given me a son.*" You were a baby when she set that down.

IVES. Better for her if I'd never come into the world. [*Pause.*

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*God be gracious unto thee, my son.*" And then, "*His mother made him a little coat.*"

IVES. [*Slightly interested, stops in his tramp up and down.*] Aye, she did. I mind it yet—a little flea-coloured coat when I was a nipper.

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*What shall I do for my son?*" "*Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*"

IVES. When my father went.

[*Walks up and down again.*

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*Chasten thy son while there is hope.*"

IVES. Little hope she had o' me.

RUTH. [*Reads*]. "*And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit and was in the deserts.*" . . . "*See, the smell of my son is the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed.*"

IVES. [*Calmer. He sits down.*] 'Twas when I took to farming after father died. She joyed in it.

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth.*"

IVES. Ah, I hadn't begun to break her heart then.

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*Master, I have brought unto Thee my son. Master, I beseech Thee look upon my son.*" [*Pause.*

IVES. Go on.

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*Lord have mercy upon my son.*"

IVES. I laid in clink that night.

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*As one whom his mother com-*

forteth, so will I comfort you." 'Twas when you came back to her.

IVES. Aye—she comforted me—and more than that.

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*O turn unto me and have mercy upon me; give Thy strength unto thy servant and save the son of Thine handmaid.*"

IVES. Well she might pray for help.

RUTH. And was answered. [*Reads.*] "*For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*"

IVES. She spoke too soon.

RUTH. She knew you better than you know yourself. There's but one text more. You might think she felt 'twas going to be the last. [*Reads.*] "*He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.*" 'Twas her good-bye to you. She trusted you to her God.

IVES. Give me the paper.

RUTH. [*Tenderly.*] Stepping-stones in your life, Ives.

IVES. [*Taking paper and speaking very slowly and solemnly.*] That woman's son have got no choice.

RUTH. 'Tis like finding precious things that the dead have hoarded away for you.

IVES. She ban't dead! She's here along with me now. [*Pause.*] Do you want to marry that man?

RUTH. Yes, I do.

IVES. Before your God?

RUTH. Before my God.

IVES. Then I'll work him no harm. He must be a good chap if you can say that. He's steadfast and he's brave and he's better than me. He knowed your glory and value from the first—long before I did He deserves you better than I do. 'Tis justice. You'll make him wise again; and he'll make you happy.

RUTH. Good night. Try to——

[*Approaches him*

IVES. Good night. Go—go—go!

[RUTH *takes the little Bible and ascends the stairs.* IVES *moves here and there restlessly. Then he looks at the paper in his hand. There is a knock and* NORTHMORE *enters. He is haggard and hatless.*

NORTHMORE. You ban't to sleep? [IVES *shakes his head and puts the paper into his pocket.*] My mind was running on so—I'd planned a piano for her and all—and proper painted pictures. I was going to fill Stone Park with beautiful things for her.

IVES. So you will—'tis right you should. You've won her, and them that can't win must learn to lose.

NORTHMORE. That's true. I've got a loaded pistol in my pocket.

IVES. Why for? To blow my brains out? Sit down, man, and calm yourself. What more d'you want? She's took you for love.

NORTHMORE. For love—yes, but not for love of me.

I've spun a great web and caught myself in it. No man can face this and live. [*Shows pistol.*

IVES. You're sick, you're dreaming, Matthew. Here, calm down and tell me what's wrong. I'll take that. [*Takes pistol and puts it on the mantelshelf.*

NORTHMORE. Your mother told me that you and Ruth were dew-drops on a leaf, and would run together when the morning wind awoke. Emmanuel Codd fired my farm—not you.

IVES. Me! Hell, Matthew—! What are you saying?

NORTHMORE. He confessed it to a woman after he'd done it, and she's let it out now he's disappeared. This very night she told Nicholas Toop, and he made her tell me. They stopped me as I was going home—to praise God for His goodness. That red woman, Jill. Where's Ruth?

IVES. To bed.

NORTHMORE. Call her down. She loves you as never a girl loved a man afore.

IVES. [*Stares at* NORTHMORE. *Then goes to the staircase and ascends a few steps.*] Ruth, I want 'e.

NORTHMORE. Be there mortal man that can live beside that woman and not want her?

[RUTH *appears and descends the stairs.*

NORTHMORE. [*To* RUTH.] 'Tis all over. He'll tell you. The dream's ended. You're free.

RUTH. Thank God you know the truth.

NORTHMORE. I believed my eyes; you believed

your heart. And you were right. Now I'll be gone.

IVES. You're honest and just—all men know that. Wilt drink? You're shook up seemingly. [NORTHMORE *shakes his head.*] Come on then. I be going to see you home to-night. [*Exit* NORTHMORE.

IVES. [*To* RUTH.] Bide up for me.

[*He puts on his hat and follows* NORTHMORE. RUTH *stands at the open door and looks after them.*

CURTAIN

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